

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 54

DEAN DUNHAM

or The Waterford Mystery



BY

HORATIO ALGER, JR.

"Mr. Kirby," said Dean, his face flaming with indignation, "do you mean to charge me with taking that pocket-book?" Meanwhile, Dean, with flushed and angry countenance, looked from one face to another, but everywhere he met looks of distrust.

BRAVE & BOLD

A Different Complete Story Every Week

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$3.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1903, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C. STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 54.

NEW YORK, January 2, 1904.

Price Five Cents.

DEAN DUNHAM;

OR,

The Waterford Mystery.

By HORATIO ALGER, JR.

CHAPTER I.

ADIN DUNHAM GOES TO ROCKMOUNT.

"I've been looking forward to this day for weeks, Sarah," said Adin Dunham, as he rose from the breakfast table on a certain Wednesday morning in the early part of June.

"Why, father, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Dunham, curiously.

"Because to-day I am to receive a thousand dollars—a thousand dollars in hard cash," answered her husband, in a tone of exultation.

"Well, I declare!" ejaculated his wife, in amazement. "Who on earth is going to give you a thousand dollars?"

"No one is going to give it to me; it's my own."

"How strangely you do talk, Adin Dunham! You ain't out of your mind, be you?"

"Not as I know of," answered her husband, with an amused smile.

"Is it really true that somebody is going to pay you a thousand dollars?"

"Yes, it is. You know when Uncle Dan died he left me a piece of stony pasture land in Rockmount?"

"Yes, I know. You never could sell it, I've heard you say ag'in and ag'in."

"Well, I've sold it at last. There's a company goin' to put up a big hotel just on that spot, and they've offered me a thousand dollars for the land. Well, I agreed to let 'em have it. I'm going over to-day to get the money."

"Why, it'll make us rich, Adin. I never expected you'd be wuth a thousand dollars."

"I wonder what Uncle Dan would have said if he'd thought I would have got so much for the land. He never cared much for me, and he only left me that because he thought it wasn't wuth anything. He did better by me than he expected."

"How are you goin' over to Rockmount?"

"I'll borrow neighbor Gould's horse and buggy. That horse is pretty strong, and he won't mind the twenty miles—ten there and ten back."

"I don't like to have you travelin' so far with all that money. S'pose you should meet with robbers."

"There ain't any robbers around here, Sarah. This is a respectable community."

"Well, Adin, you know best. Hadn't you better take Dean with you?"

"Why should I take Dean?"

"It would be safer for two than for one."

"You don't mean to say that I need a boy of sixteen to protect me? If I thought I did, I'd stay at home, and send Dean by himself."

"Well, Adin, I don't want to interfere. It wouldn't be much use, either, for you generally have your own way. Have you told any of the neighbors that you are goin' for some money?"

"No; except Lawyer Bates."

"What did Squire Bates say?"

"He told me I'd better not tell anybody else. He talked for all the world just like you did, Sarah. You haven't been chat-terin' with the squire, have you?"

"No, Adin, I don't like him well enough for that. I never fancied the squire. He's always showin' those long front teeth of his, like a wild beast. And that boy of his—Brandon—is his very image, even to the teeth."

"Well, he does favor his father considerable."

"Dean doesn't like him. He's a very big feeling boy. He looks down on Dean because he is the nephew of a poor man."

"Oh, he'll get wiser in time. We mustn't mind them young folks so much. Boys will be boys."

"So they will, but there's different kinds of boys."

Just then Dean came into the house—a broad-shouldered, strongly-built boy, with a frank, open countenance and red cheeks.

"Dean," said his uncle, "won't you go over to neighbor Gould, and ask if he will lend his horse and buggy for the day? I'm goin' over to Rockmount."

"Going to Rockmount?" repeated Dean, eagerly. "Will you take me, uncle?"

"Not to-day, Dean. It's a long ride, and it'll be easier on the horse to carry one than two."

Dean looked disappointed. A ride to Rockmount, which was a considerably larger place than Waterford, would have been to him a very agreeable recreation; but he was not a boy to complain or tease when a favor had been refused. So he indulged in no remonstrance, but went over to Mr. Gould's dwelling, only twenty rods away, and preferred the request.

"Certainly," said Mr. Gould, pleasantly. "So your uncle has business in Rockmount, has he?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose so; but he didn't tell me what it is."

"Well, tell him not to overdrive the Captain." (This was the rather peculiar name of Mr. Gould's horse.)

"I don't think there's any danger," said Dean, smiling, for he knew that Adin Dunham was one of the most deliberate of men, and permitted a horse to select his own pace.

Adin Dunham got into the buggy, took the reins from Dean, and drove away.

The pretentious house of Squire Bates stood a little way back from the road a quarter of a mile farther on. The lawyer stood in front of his gate. He smiled as Adin Dunham drove by.

"Well, Dunham," he said, "so you are on your way to Rockmount?"

"Yes, squire."

"And bound on a pleasant errand, too," continued Bates, with a second smile.

"Yes, squire. I can't believe it hardly. It's a new experience for me. I never thought I should be worth a thousand dollars."

"Yes, it's quite a sum. What do you propose to do with it?"

"I may pay up the mortgage on my place."

"But suppose I don't want to receive it?"

"But why wouldn't you want to receive it?"

"Oh, it's paying me fairish interest, and I should have to look up another investment."

"But you could do that better than I."

"Come and see me when you get back, and I'll give you advice. I wouldn't trouble myself for every one, but you are a friend and neighbor," said Squire Bates, smiling, and showing the long, white tusks that gave him so peculiar an appearance.

"Your advice ought to be good, squire. You are used to investin' money."

"Yes, I have a good deal to invest," said Bates. "Which way shall you return?" asked the squire, carelessly.

"I thought I might take the creek road, squire."

"If it were my case, I would come through the woods. It's half a mile shorter."

"That's so," said Adin Dunham, eagerly.

"Then you'll come through the woods?"

"Yes."

"About what time?"

"Oh, I shan't stay very long after my business is done."

"You'll probably pass through about three o'clock?"

"Well, say four."

"Good luck to you," said Bates, as he turned, and went into the house.

Squire Bates had been for three years a resident of Waterford. He appeared to have plenty of money, though it was a mystery where it came from. He professed to be a lawyer, and had an office, but beyond writing a will or a lease, or some such matter, had no practice to speak of. This, however, did not seem to trouble him. It was a popular belief that the care of his property gave him considerable to do. He had no investments in Waterford except the house he lived in, and a mortgage on the house and small landed property of Adin Dunham. The assessors got very little satisfaction out of him when they questioned him about his taxable property.

"I am taxed elsewhere," he said, briefly.

"But you have some personal property?"

"Oh, well, you may put me down for a thousand dollars."

"It is generally supposed that you have a much larger personal property than that."

"I have, gentlemen," answered Bates, frankly, "but you know that government bonds are not taxable."

That explained it. The board of assessors jumped to the conclusion that Squire Bates had a large sum in government bonds, and did not pursue their inquiries further.

There was one thing that puzzled Waterford people about the lawyer. He often absented himself in a mysterious way, sometimes for weeks at a time. He never told where he went, nor did his wife and son when questioned appear to know. At any rate, they never gave any information. He would reappear, as suddenly as he had disappeared, and always explain briefly that he had been away on business. What the nature of the business was he did not state, a sensible thing probably, but his reticence excited considerable remark among his fellow-townsmen, who did not approve of it.

When Squire Bates re-entered the house he went up to his room—his library was on the second floor—and locked the door. He sat down in a rocking-chair, and seemed plunged in thought.

"A thousand dollars!" he soliloquized. "It is a good sum of money. It would be a great lift to Adin Dunham. It would enable him to pay off the mortgage on his place, and that would not suit me. I prefer to foreclose by and by. Upon the whole, the money will be better in my hands than in his. It was well I suggested to him not to come home by the creek road. That is too open, and would not suit my plans."

Lawyer Bates arose, and, taking a key from his pocket, opened the door of a small closet. It was a clothes closet evidently, but its contents were of a curious character. There was one suit that a fastidious tramp would have scorned to wear. There were several masks. There were disguises of different kinds, three wigs, one red, and false beards. Of what earthly use could these articles be to a respectable country lawyer?

His son Brandon was like his father, even to the teeth. He was a boy of cruel instincts, haughty and imperious, and disposed to lord it over his schoolmates and companions. He was heartily tired of Waterford, and had more than once suggested to his father that it would be wise to leave it.

"When I want your advice, Brandon, I will ask for it," said Squire Bates, briefly.

Brandon did not press the matter. He knew his father too well, but he complained to his mother.

"What on earth can father be thinking of to stay in such a quiet hole as Waterford?"

"It is a pleasant village, Brandon," said his mother, gently.

"What is there pleasant about it?"

"The people are pleasant."

"I have no fit associates."

"There is Dean Dunham, who is about your age."

"I hate him!" said Brandon, passionately.

"Why do you hate him, my son? Mrs. Dunham tells me he is a great comfort to her."

"I don't know anything about that. He is very impudent to me. He seems to think he is my equal."

"I am afraid you are too proud, Brandon."

"Isn't father the richest man in Waterford, I'd like to know? Dean Dunham is the nephew of a poor carpenter, who keeps him out of charity."

"Ah, Brandon, you shouldn't value people for their money."

"Dean Dunham is no fit companion for me. If I were in the city, I should find plenty of associates."

Gentle Mrs. Bates sighed. She could not approve of her son's pride.

About four o'clock that afternoon Mrs. Dunham began to look for her husband.

"It's time your Uncle Adin was at home," she said. "I suppose his business kept him longer than he expected."

Just then Mr. Gould entered the yard. He looked excited and anxious.

"Dean," he said, "something's happened to your uncle. My horse just ran into my yard with the empty buggy."

Dean turned pale.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

"Come with me. We'll go back over the road, and see if we can find him. Not a word to your aunt! We don't want to make her anxious."

CHAPTER II.

ADIN DUNHAM RECEIVES HIS MONEY.

Adin Dunham's ride to Rockmount had been uneventful. He went at once to the real estate office of Thomas Marks, the agent through whom the sale had been effected. When he entered the office it was with a light step and a joyful look, for it was on a very agreeable errand he had come.

Mr. Marks was seated at his desk, and looked up as Dunham entered.

"I thought you wouldn't fail to come, Mr. Dunham," he said, with a smile. "If it were to pay money, there might have been some question of it, but a man doesn't generally miss an appointment to receive a payment of a thousand dollars."

"That's so, Mr. Marks, I've been looking forward to this day."

"I've no doubt of it. I suppose such occasions are rare with you."

"This is the first time I was ever lucky enough to receive a large sum of money. I can hardly believe I am so rich. You see, Mr. Marks, I am a poor man, and always have been. I inherited the place where I live from my father, but no money to speak of."

"Is the place clear?"

"No; it is mortgaged for eight hundred dollars."

"Who holds the mortgage?"

"Squire Bates, of our village."

"I know him. He is the man with very prominent teeth."

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Dunham, how will you receive this money? Shall I give you a check?"

"No; I shouldn't know what to do with a check. I never received a check in my life," said Adin Dunham, shaking his head.

All bank matters were unknown to the carpenter, except that he had once a small deposit in a savings bank, but he never could get rid of the fear that the bank would break, and he finally drew it out to get his mind at rest.

"A check would be safer, I think," said the agent.

"How can it be safer? The bank might break before I got the money."

Thomas Marks smiled.

"Well," he said, "here is a pile of fifty-dollar bills—twenty of them. I will count them before you, so that you may see they are all right, and then you may give me a receipt."

So the thousand dollars were counted out, and Adin Dunham put them into his capacious pocket, which perhaps in its history of five years had never contained in the aggregate so large a sum of money.

The carpenter breathed a deep sigh of satisfaction. The moment he had so long anticipated had arrived, and he carried with him a sum which seemed to him a fortune, all his, and all to be disposed of as he willed. He straightened up unconsciously, for he felt that he had become a person of importance.

He jumped into his buggy, and when he had finished his errands in Rockmount, he started in the direction of home.

When Adin Dunham reached the fork in the road from which there were two different routes to Waterford, he halted his horse in indecision.

"Seems to me as if I'd rather go over the creek road," he said, to himself. "I don't know why 'tis that I don't fancy goin' through the woods to-day. It's a silly fancy, no doubt, for I've gone that way hundreds of times, and I told the squire I'd go that way, and I'll do it, or he'll think strange of it."

So he turned to the left instead of the right, and continued his journey. Is it true that we have presentiments of coming evil? This was, at any rate, the case with Adin Dunham. He felt a growing uneasiness, especially when he drew near the tract of woods through which the road ran for nearly quarter of a mile.

He had reached the middle point of the woods, and was beginning to breathe easier. Neither before nor behind was any one in sight.

But just then a noise was heard to the right, and a tramp burst out, his features concealed by a mask, and sprang for the horse's head.

"Halt there!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice.

Adin Dunham's tongue refused service, and with pallid cheeks, betokening intense fear, he stared at the apparition.

"What do you want?" he managed to ejaculate at last.

"Quick! Give me that money," hissed the stranger.

"Are you a robber?" asked Dunham, with blanched face.

"Never mind what I am! I want that money. It will be as much as your life is worth to refuse."

Adin Dunham was not a brave man, but the prospect of losing his fortune, for which he had waited so long, made him desperate. He drew out his whip and lashed the horse.

"Get up, Captain!" he shouted.

Then, he hardly knew how it happened, the tramp clambered into the wagon, and pressed a handkerchief to his mouth. He felt his senses going, but before he lost consciousness he saw

something that startled him. The tramp opened his mouth, and he caught sight of the long, tusk-like teeth.

"Why, it's Squire Bates!" he ejaculated, in horror-struck dismay.

Then he lost all consciousness, and knew not what followed.

"Confusion!" muttered the tramp. "Why did I open my mouth?"

He thrust his hand into Adin Dunham's pocket, after stopping the horse. Then, as it would not be safe to leave the horse under the management of a man in a faint, he took the passive form of the carpenter from the wagon, and laid him down under a tree by the roadside.

"There! It will be supposed that he fell from the wagon in a fit!" he said, to himself, as he left the scene.

This was what had happened to Adin Dunham. How long he lay in his senseless condition cannot be told. At length he opened his eyes, and looked about him in a dazed way.

"Where is the horse and wagon?" he asked himself.

The horse and wagon were not to be seen. The Captain had waited patiently, looking around from time to time, and gazing in evident doubt at his driver, whinneying a hint that they had been stopping long enough. Probably he wondered what was the matter with Adin Dunham, who, though not his master, was well known to him.

At length the Captain decided that he must settle the matter for himself. He started for home at an easy pace, and arrived there at length, as we know, very much to the surprise of Mr. Gould, and the uneasiness of Dean Dunham. We have already related the sequel—how Mr. Gould and Dean got into the buggy, and, somewhat to the dissatisfaction of the horse, started back on the road to Rockmount.

They reached the point where it was necessary to decide whether to go by the creek road or through the woods.

"I declare, Dean, it puzzles me to decide which way to go."

"If anything happened to uncle on the creek road somebody would be sure to pass and see him."

"That's a very sensible suggestion. On the woods road, on the contrary, there are but few passengers, and he might be overlooked. So be it! We'll go by the woods road."

Not far from the place where Adin Dunham was waylaid, Dean pointed eagerly to an advancing figure.

"Isn't that Uncle Adin?" he asked, eagerly pointing with his whip.

"Yes, it is, I declare."

Adin Dunham was walking with his head drooping, and seemed to drag one leg after the other in a weary way. He did not seem at all like himself.

"Uncle Adin," called Dean, when they were within hearing, "what's the matter? What has happened to you?"

Adin Dunham looked up, and sighed heavily.

"Dean," he said, hoarsely, "I've been robbed!"

"Robbed, neighbor Dunham?" said Mr. Gould, in surprise. "What have you been robbed off?"

"A thousand dollars!" answered Dunham, in a spiritless way.

Dean and Mr. Gould looked at each other in amazement. The same thought came to each. That the carpenter could have had in his possession a thousand dollars seemed preposterous. His mind must suddenly have gone astray.

"Yes," said poor Adin, bursting into tears. "A man sprang at me when I was riding through the wood, jumped into the buggy, and searched my pockets. I think I must have fainted away. When I came to the horse was gone, and I was lying under a tree by the roadside."

This story, though strictly correct, seemed a wild dream to Mr. Gould and Dean.

"How did you happen to have a thousand dollars with you? Was it yours?" asked Mr. Gould, almost with a smile.

"I received it to-day at Rockmount, for the land I sold the hotel people."

"Have you any idea who robbed you of the money?"

"It was Squire Bates. I knew him by his teeth."

"Dean," said Mr. Gould, in a low voice, "your uncle is as crazy as a bedbug! What can have put such notions into his head?"

CHAPTER III.

DEAN FINDS A CLEW.

Dean was inclined to agree with his companion. The story told by his uncle was so preposterous that it could be explained only on the hypothesis that the speaker's mind was unbalanced.

Adin Dunham was invited to take a seat in the buggy, Dean resigning his place and sitting behind. So they reached home.

"Go in, Dean, and tell your aunt what has happened, so that she needn't be frightened when she sees your uncle," said Mr. Gould.

Dean obeyed instructions.

"Aunt," said Dean, "you are not to be frightened, but uncle met with an accident. He isn't hurt!" he added, noticing the quick look of alarm, "but he says he has been robbed."

"Robbed! Has he lost the thousand dollars?" exclaimed Mrs. Dunham, in a trembling voice.

"Did he really have a thousand dollars?" said Dean. "I thought he might be under a delusion."

"Then he says he has lost it?"

"Yes."

"Heaven help us to bear this terrible blow!" ejaculated Mrs. Dunham, sinking into a chair. "I wish he had taken you with him."

"I wish so, too. I don't believe one robber would have been a match for us both."

Here Adin Dunham entered the house. He looked ten years older than when he left it in the morning, and there was a vacant look in the eyes.

"Wife!" he said, feebly, "it's all gone! Some villain has robbed me of the thousand dollars."

"But you, Adin, were you hurt? You look sick."

"My head doesn't feel right. I think it's the shock."

"I'll get you some hot tea directly. You'll feel better after taking it."

"I hope so. Oh, Sarah, I didn't expect such a blow as this."

"Try not to think of it now. Get well first, and then we'll see what we can do to find the robber."

"I know him now!"

"You know who robbed you!" said his wife, stopping short in her surprise.

"Yes."

"Who was it? Any one livin' 'round here?"

"It was Squire Bates."

A terrible suspicion entered the mind of the poor wife. It was clear to her that her husband's mind was unhinged.

The next day Adin Dunham kept his bed. The shock to his system was such that his strength gave way, and the doctor was summoned.

"Adin," said his wife, anxious to clear up her doubts as to his sanity, "can you describe the man that robbed you?"

"Why should I describe him? You know how he looks as well as I do."

"How should I know, Adin?"

"It was Squire Bates, I tell you. You know how he looks."

The poor woman went out of the room, and raised her apron to her eyes.

"Poor Adin is clean upset!" she murmured. "It isn't enough that he's lost his money, he must lose his mind, too. Misfortunes never come singly, as my poor old father used to say."

"Dean," she continued, when they were alone, "your uncle sticks to his story that Squire Bates robbed him."

"Aunt Sarah," answered Dean, gravely, "a thousand dollars would tempt almost anybody!"

"Dean, you don't mean to hint that the squire would tempt anybody!"

"I don't know, aunt. A good many strange things happen in the world."

"I begin to think you are as crazy as your uncle!" said Dunham, almost angrily.

"Suppose neither of us should be crazy, aunt!"

Mrs. Dunham shook her head. She was surprised to find sensible a boy as Dean should give credence to the absurd conclusion of her husband.

Meanwhile, Dean had come to a conclusion as to what he would visit the place where the robbery took place—his uncle had described it so accurately that there would be no mistaking it—and see whether there was anything to be learned there.

He found an opportunity the very next afternoon.

It was a considerable walk to the place indicated, but he reached it in due time. He was afraid he would meet some one who would ask him his object, but it was a lonely spot, and on the team passed. He saw it in time to dodge into the woods, so avoided questioning.

When the team had passed on he came out to the road and could see the exact position of the buggy at the time it was stopped by the robber, and he found the tree under which his uncle was placed in an unconscious condition.

"I have satisfied my curiosity," he said, to himself, "but I haven't got any information."

Just then his sharp eyes fell upon a small, bright object on the ground about three feet from the tree. He pounced upon it eagerly, and picked it up.

It was a sleeve button, apparently gold. Just in the center was a black initial letter. This letter was "B"!

Dean's eyes lighted up.

"This may lead to something," he said, to himself, quite quietly, as he slipped the button into his pocket.

"B stands for Bates," said Dean, to himself. "Perhaps my uncle may not be so far wrong, after all. But how strange it would be if a rich and prominent man like Squire Bates had stooped to such a crime! I find it very hard to believe."

Dean's perplexed look gave place to one of firm determination.

"I mean to look up this matter," he said, resolutely, "my uncle has been robbed of his little fortune by this man, and I mean to bring him to justice if I can."

Scarcely had this purpose been formed when he heard the sound of wheels, and not caring to be found by one who might ask curious questions, he concealed himself behind a tree.

What was his surprise when, as the buggy stopped, he saw that its solitary occupant was the man who had been so prominent in his thoughts—Squire Bates himself.

"What does he want here?" thought Dean.

From his post behind the tree he glanced curiously at the arrival, and watched what he should do.

Squire Bates descended from the buggy, and then walked toward the very tree under which Adin Dunham had, according

finally he determined to put it to the proof by letting Brandon see it accidentally.

He waited for a favorable opportunity. One day when the boys were at recess, and Brandon standing only three feet distant, he plunged his hand into his pocket, and drew out three pennies and the telltale sleeve button, showing it so plainly that Brandon couldn't help seeing it.

"Where did you get that button?" asked Brandon, sharply.

"What button?"

"The sleeve button marked 'B'."

"I found it," answered Dean, composedly.

"Where did you find it?"

"Why do you feel so much interest in it?" demanded Dean. "I don't know that I am called upon to tell you where I found it."

"I believe you stole it!" said Brandon.

"Say that again, Brandon Bates, and I'll knock you over!"

ported Dean, with spirit. "Do you mean to insult me?"

"I have a right to say what I did. That sleeve button belongs to my father."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Dean, his face lighting up, for he had made the discovery he desired.

"Yes, I am sure of it. I have seen the button plenty of times."

"Yes, you know B stands for Bates."

"Did you pick up the other, also?" asked Brandon.

"No."

"Where did you pick it up?"

"I don't think it necessary to tell you."

"You will have to tell my father."

"That is just what I am willing to do. If you will find out whether your father has lost such a button, and will let me know, I will go and see him about it, and answer any questions he may choose to ask about where I found it."

"It will be just the same if you give it to me."

"Excuse me, Brandon; but I prefer to surrender it to your father."

When Brandon went home from school he lost no time in bringing the matter to his father.

"Papa," he said, "Dean Dunham's got a sleeve button of mine."

"What!" exclaimed Squire Bates, nervously.

"One of the sleeve buttons marked 'B'. Did you know you lost one of them?"

"No. So—the Dunham boy has got it?"

"Yes; he showed it to me at recess."

"Where did he say he got it?" asked Squire Bates, with a worried look.

"He wouldn't tell me. I asked him, but he said he wouldn't say one but you; and, though I told him I knew it was yours, he wouldn't give it to me."

"The boy did right," said Squire Bates, recovering his self-possession. "Perhaps it isn't mine."

"I know it is yours, papa!" persisted Brandon.

"Very well! You may ask Dean Dunham to bring it to me. I will soon decide that point."

"This is awkward!" said the squire, to himself, as he paced up and down after Brandon had left his presence. "I can guess where the boy found the button. I must put him off the track by giving him a plausible explanation as I can devise."

"My father says you are to call with the sleeve button, Dean Dunham," said Brandon Bates, in an imperious tone.

"Very well; I shall be happy to oblige him," answered Dean, with a smile. "I will call this evening."

That evening Dean did call, and was ushered into the squire's study room.

"How is your uncle, Dean?" asked Squire Bates.

pro

ag

"Not very well, Squire Bates. He hasn't been himself since the robbery."

"Oh, ah! Yes. It was, no doubt, quite a shock to him."

"By the way," continued the squire, carelessly, "Brandon tells me you have found a sleeve button which he thinks belongs to me."

"Yes, sir; would you like to see it?"

"Certainly, if you have it with you."

Dean produced from his vest pocket the button already referred to.

"Is it yours?" he inquired.

"It looks very much like one I once owned," said the squire, taking it in his hand. "Did you find the mate to it?"

"No," answered Dean, in surprise. "Is the other button lost also?"

"Yes," said Squire Bates. "By the by, where did you find

"Only a few feet from the spot where my uncle was robbed—in the woods," answered Dean, scrutinizing the face of the button closely as he spoke. But Squire Bates was prepared for disclosure, and betrayed neither surprise nor confusion.

"Indeed!" he said. "This is most interesting. When you find it?"

"On the day afterward."

"It must have been dropped by the person who robbed your uncle, then?"

"That is just what I thought," said Dean, much surprised at this apparent confession on the part of the squire.

"I must now tell you that the sleeve buttons, with a small sum of money, mysteriously disappeared about that time," the squire continued, in a confidential manner. "I am inclined to attribute their loss to a tramp who was seen prowling around my house the day before your uncle's misfortune. It looks as if both robberies were by the same person."

Dean stared at the squire in amazement. He had not seen this crafty explanation, and though he utterly disbelieved in its truth, he saw no way of discrediting it. The bomb which he anticipated exploding, to the squire's utter confusion, in the light of this statement appeared a very innocent and harmless one indeed. He kept silent, but the cunning squire with pleasure noted his discomfiture.

Dean was almost inclined to ask himself if this could be a real explanation, when the thought of his uncle's description of the robber occurred to him. But on this point he did not dwell; it would do any good at present to speak.

"I wish," added the squire, with a smile, "you had found the sleeve buttons, as I would in that case have asked you to acceptance of them."

"They are marked 'B,'" objected Dean.

"True; I did not think of that. Let me ask your acceptance of a small reward," and Squire Bates drew from his pocket a dollar.

But Dean shrank back. He was convinced in spite of the squire's words that Squire Bates was the robber of Adin Dunham, and he did not feel willing to accept any favor at his hands.

"Thank you," he answered, "but I don't care to take money."

"Perhaps you have all the money you want," said the squire, with a sneer which he did not quite succeed in repressing.

"Money is very scarce with all of us, Squire Bates," said Dean gravely; "but I would rather earn what I get. If you will give me the button I will accept it."

"What good will it do you?" demanded the squire, suspiciously.

"Probably none at all. But if this tramp should be found

much, and I wish he hadn't offered me pay for guiding him. He doesn't seem to have been here before."

* * * * *

"What, Kirby!" said the squire, as the new arrival entered his study.

"Yes, it is I, captain," answered Peter Kirby, sinking into an armchair. "You seem comfortably fixed here."

"Yes; I have tried to make myself comfortable."

"And I understand you go by the name of squire?"

"How did you learn that?"

"From a boy who guided me here."

"I hope you did not express any surprise."

"Oh, no! I did nothing to arouse suspicion. Are you a justice of the peace?"

"Yes."

"And perhaps preside over trials?"

"Well, yes, sometimes."

"Ha, ha!"

"What are you laughing at?" demanded the squire, irritably.

"It is a good joke. Suppose the good people here were acquainted with your real character?"

"Hush; this is no time for jesting. You might be overheard. Now, what news?"

"Well, there isn't much. Things have been pretty quiet. You haven't been at any of our meetings lately?"

"No; I did not care to excite suspicion. I've been engaged in little enterprise on my own account."

"What, here?"

"Yes."

"What was it?" asked Kirby, with interest.

"I learned that one of my neighbors—a simple-minded carpenter—was to receive a considerable sum of money, which I had reason to think he would bring home in person. I disguised myself, lay in wait for him, and took the whole."

"How much was there?"

"A thousand dollars!"

"Excellent! And you have it here?"

"Yes. It happened to be in fifty-dollar bills, and I have not dared to use any of it lest it should be traced to me. Besides, there is one who suspects me of having been implicated in the affair."

"Is it a person likely to prove dangerous?"

"I don't know. It is a boy."

"A boy! How should a boy be likely to suspect you?"

"The squire explained, telling about the sleeve button."

"Have you the money by you still?"

"Yes."

"Squire Bates arose from his seat, locked the door, and then taking a small cabinet drew out a roll of bills—which he showed before his visitor."

"See," he said. "Here are twenty bills, amounting in all to a thousand dollars."

"Peter Kirby's eyes brightened covetously as he eyed this large sum of money."

"It was a good haul for one man to make, in a quiet place like this," he said.

"I flatter myself," said Squire Bates, complacently.

"But I can't help expressing my surprise at your burying yourself in such a small, out of the way place. If you were in one of our large cities, for instance, it would be much more convenient, and the rest of the band could communicate with you better."

"Squire Bates arose, and paced the room, thoughtfully."

"That is true," he said, after a pause; "but you must remember

also that I should stand a better chance of being recognized in a large and important place, where there is a well-disciplined and efficient police force, and an organized body of detectives. No one would think of looking for me in a small, unimportant village like Waterford, where I pass as the village lawyer, and have a commission as justice of the peace.

"But, to come back to business. I shall hand you these bills," and ask you to exchange them for bills of other denominations. You can send them to me in an express package."

"There will be some risk about this, won't there, as it is known that the stolen money was in fifty-dollar bills?"

"Not if you go far enough away. I shall want you to go to Chicago on other business which I will communicate to you. There you will have no difficulty in effecting the change."

"I suppose I am to have a commission?"

"Yes; you can retain fifty dollars."

"That is small, captain," said Kirby, in a tone of discontent.

"It may be, but I have other work for you to do which will increase your remunerations."

"What sort of work?"

"I have already told you of a boy in the village who suspects me of being implicated in the robbery."

"Yes."

"I mean you to take him with you."

"What, and to abduct him? That will be difficult and dangerous."

"No, you are to offer him lucrative employment, and he will go with you willingly. Then you are to get him into trouble, involve him in a crime, perhaps, and he won't dare to come back. I learn from Brandon that he is anxious to obtain a position. However, I will give you detailed instructions how to proceed."

CHAPTER VI.

DEAN IS ENGAGED AS PRIVATE SECRETARY.

The next day Dean received a letter by a messenger.

Dean tore open the envelope, and read as follows, in the handwriting of Squire Bates:

"DEAN DUNHAM: I understand from my son, Brandon, that you are seeking employment, and have no objection to leave home. A gentleman at present visiting me is in want of a clerk and secretary, and he would like to have an interview with you. As he leaves town to-morrow, I send for you this evening.

"RENWICK BATES."

Dean felt that nothing would suit him better.

He felt grateful to Squire Bates for what he regarded as a piece of unexpected kindness, and he went at once to the house.

He soon found himself in the presence of the squire and of Peter Kirby.

"Good-evening, Dean," said the squire, pleasantly. "This is my friend, Mr. Kirby."

"I have seen the young man before," said Kirby, opening his mouth in what he tried to make a pleasant smile.

"Yes, sir. I remember you."

Looking at Kirby as his future employer, Dean was not prepossessed in his favor. He was certainly far from an agreeable-looking man, but Dean was disposed to judge him without prejudice. He knew that a fair outside sometimes accompanies very undesirable traits, and the reverse might also be the case.

"If you read my note, you understand that Mr. Kirby is in want of a young man, or boy, to assist him in the capacity of clerk or private secretary," the squire put in.

"I hope I may suit, sir," said Dean, earnestly, addressing himself to Peter Kirby.

"Oh, I am not very hard to suit. If a boy does his duty, and studies my interests, he won't find me a hard master."

"I think I can promise that I will serve you faithfully, sir."

"Is your uncle willing to have you leave home?" asked the squire.

"Yes. I've talked the matter over with him."

"Then there will be no difficulty there."

"How soon would you like to have me begin, sir; that is, if you are willing to engage me?"

"Well, you can report at French's Hotel on Saturday—day after to-morrow. I suppose you can find your way to New York alone?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I have never been there, but I am sure I shall have no difficulty."

"I will give the boy the necessary directions, Kirby," said Squire Bates. "He has a tongue in his head, and can ask questions."

"What salary do you expect, Master Dunham?" asked Kirby.

"I will leave that to you, sir."

"I am willing to pay a fair salary, say twenty-five dollars a month, and your board and lodging thrown in. Will that be satisfactory?"

"It is more than I anticipated," said Dean, quite dazzled by the offer. He reckoned that he would be able to send some money home to his uncle and aunt every month—and thus have the pleasure of making up to some extent for the expense which they had incurred on his account.

"Then that matter is settled. Here is a card with my address on it. You will find me at French's Hotel at one o'clock in the day. If anything occurs to detain me, you can wait in the office till I return. My friend, Bates, here, will supply money for your journey."

Dean understood that there was nothing more to be said, and he arose and took his leave. He went home in a fever of excitement, for he felt that he was about to enter the great world of which he had heard so much, and which he so earnestly longed to see.

Adin Dunham and his wife were surprised and dazzled by the brilliant prospects of their nephew.

"Did this Mr. Kirby really agree to pay you twenty-five dollars a month, Dean?" asked the carpenter.

"Yes, uncle, and he asked me if it would be satisfactory."

"It seems strange," mused Adin. "Why, when I was your age I was workin' for fifty cents a week and my board."

"I get board, too, Uncle Adin."

"It's a great offer. And you're a stranger to him, too."

"Yes; he took me on Squire Bates' recommendation."

"Father," said Mrs. Dunham, anxiously, "do you think it's safe for a boy as young as Dean to go out into the world alone? He's only a child."

"I'm almost sixteen, aunt," said Dean, mortified.

"But you don't know nothin' of the world."

"Neither do you or I, wife, though we're both risin' sixty. Dean has got to take his chances."

"We'll trust him, wife. He means well, and if he's keeful he'll come out all right."

At length the morning came for Dean's departure. He bade good-by to the old folks, and walked proudly to the railroad station with a bundle of clothing under his arm.

Rather to his surprise he found Squire Bates at the little depot, walking up and down on the platform.

"So you're starting, are you, Dean?" said the squire.

"Yes, sir."

"I hope you'll do your duty by your employer."

"I shall try to do so, sir."

"I take it for granted that you will verify the good things I have said of you. If you don't—if you throw discredit on me, and on your worthy uncle and aunt, why then—" and he paused.

Dean listened to hear how he would end the sentence.

"Then," resumed the squire, "I honestly advise you to stay away, and not return to Waterford."

"I won't come back unless I can come back with a good record," said Dean, impetuously.

"A good resolution! Stick to it, my lad."

The train came up with a rush, and Dean got on board. He was a little disturbed by the squire's parting words. Why should he harp so much on Dean's acting discreditably?

"It almost seems as if he expected I would," soliloquized Dean. "If I know myself, I know that I am honest, industrious and faithful. Mr. Kirby won't be disappointed in me, unless he is an unreasonable man."

CHAPTER VII.

DEAN BECOMES SUSPICIOUS.

Waterford was about fifty miles from New York, and the journey took two hours.

Arriving in the metropolis, Dean had little difficulty in finding French's. This was some years since, before the temporary closing of this old-established house for travelers.

Dean, looking over the register, found this entry:

"Peter Kirby, Chicago. Room 197."

"Is Mr. Kirby at home?" he inquired.

"I will send up and see," said the clerk. "Do you wish to go up at the same time?"

"Yes, sir."

Dean followed the bell boy upstairs to one of the upper floors. He had never been in a large hotel before, and as he saw door after door opening on the corridor he thought the hotel must be one of the largest buildings in New York. In this, of course, he was very much mistaken.

"That's Mr. Kirby's room," said the bell boy, pointing to one hundred and ninety-seven. "Shall I knock, or will you?"

"I'll go in; he expects me," answered Dean; and, with a want of ceremony which was the result of his inexperience, he did not stop to knock, but opened the door.

Sitting at a table was his employer, with a number of bank bills spread out before him, which he appeared to be engaged in counting. Naturally, Dean glanced at them, and his surprise was great when he recognized the denomination of the bills.

They were all fifties! What could it mean? Was this man Kirby the one who had robbed his uncle? But his intimate relations with Squire Bates presented another explanation. The bills might have been received from the squire.

Dean's reflections were cut short by his employer.

With a look of alarm and annoyance he swept the bills together, and turning to Dean, said, harshly: "Why did you come in without knocking?"

"Excuse me!" said Dean, in a tone of apology, "I didn't think."

"It was positively rude," said Kirby, in an excited tone. "One would know that you had been brought up in the country."

"I haven't been around much," said Dean, "but I hope to improve, especially if I travel about with you."

"There's no harm done," said Peter Kirby, cooling down rap-

idly, concluding that Dean had seen nothing to excite his suspicion; "but I was a little startled when you opened the door. It's dangerous for a man to be seen with money in a large city like this, for there are plenty of designing persons who might seek to relieve him of it."

"I hope you don't suspect me, Mr. Kirby."

"Certainly not. Well, you left Waterford this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your luggage?"

"Here, sir," answered Dean, showing his bundle.

Kirby frowned.

"It will never do to travel with a bundle like that. You must have a valise. I haven't time to go around with you. Do you think you can be trusted to find a place where they are sold?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here is a five-dollar bill. You can take it and look up a valise. Three or four dollars ought to buy one. A small one will answer, judging from the size of your bundle. I suppose you have had nothing to eat since you left Waterford?"

"No, sir."

"You can go to a restaurant and get some dinner. This hotel is on the European system, and doesn't provide regular board."

"Shall I take my bundle with me, sir?"

"Yes; you can transfer the contents to the valise when you have bought one. When you return you can put your name on the hotel book, and take a room with this Guy Gladstone."

"Thank you, sir."

Dean followed his employer's instructions.

First, he got something to eat. After dinner he found a place near the corner of Wall Street and Broadway, where he bought a valise of neat appearance and good quality for three dollars. He adopted Mr. Kirby's suggestion, and, opening his bundle, put the contents into his new purchase.

He then turned down Wall Street, looking curiously into the windows as he passed. At one—a broker's office—Dean found something to surprise him.

At a large counter stood Mr. Kirby with a roll of bills before him—the same, no doubt, that Dean had seen him counting at the hotel. He appeared to be purchasing government bonds, for a clerk passed him several, and gathered up the bills in exchange.

"I wish I knew whether that money I saw Mr. Kirby counting belonged to my poor uncle," thought Dean.

But his suspicions, strong as they were, might prove to do his employer injustice. At any rate, he resolved to keep on the lookout for additional evidence which might tend either to confirm or to disprove them.

If he had been present in the broker's office, he would have heard something to confirm the distrust he felt. When Peter Kirby was asked by the broker's clerk, as usual, his name, he hesitated for a second, then answered boldly, "Renwick Bates." So in the broker's book the sale of bonds was recorded as having been made to Renwick Bates. Had the squire known this, he would have felt very angry with his confederate, as, in case the fifty-dollar notes were traced, his name would be involved.

Dean was taking supper at a restaurant not far from the hotel when Mr. Kirby came in, and sat down at a table near him.

Presently another man came in, and took a seat at the same table. He seemed to have been expected.

"You're late, Pringle," said Kirby.

"Yes, I was detained. I went to Jersey City to see my wife."

"You are better provided than I. I have never found time to get married."

"Well, it's awkward sometimes in our business to have such an incumbrance."

"Does your wife know what business you are in?"

"Scarcely. She's a good church woman, and would be horrified. She thinks I am a traveling salesman."

Kirby laughed.

"I have no wife to deceive," he said. "That is where I have the advantage of you. However, you are no worse off than the captain. I've been up to see him."

"Where?"

"In the country," answered Kirby, evasively. "He's a big gun out there. They call him squire."

Both laughed.

"So he is married?"

"Yes, and has a son who is his very image, even to the long, tusk-like teeth. If ever he gets into trouble it's because they will give him away."

"They certainly are very peculiar."

"They are dangerous," responded Kirby, with emphasis. "If I had them I would get rid of them in short order; but the captain owned to me that he was afraid of the dentist."

"I suppose his family are in the dark as to his position?"

"Undoubtedly. His son is an impudent young cub. It would have given me pleasure to box his ears. He evidently thinks his father a man of great importance, and is inflated by his own estimate of his social consequence."

"What makes the captain stay in such an obscure place?"

"He tells me it is on account of his family, and also because it adds to his safety."

"When are we to see him?"

"He will be in Chicago next month, and lay out work for us to do. One thing I will say for him, he has good executive talent, but he ought not to keep out of the way so much of the time."

Then the talk drifted into other channels.

To this conversation Dean listened with the utmost attention. He felt interested and excited. He could not fail to understand that Kirby was referring to Squire Bates. The mystery was deepening. Who and what was this man who in Waterford posed as a lawyer, a reputable citizen, and a justice of the peace? It was clear that he was allied to some outside organization in which he wished to conceal his membership.

This man Kirby, who was now Dean's employer, was a friend and associate. Why, under the circumstances, should Squire Bates have been willing to send him off as Kirby's clerk or secretary? If there was anything to conceal, it was only giving him an opportunity to find it out.

"I must keep my eyes open," thought Dean. "I mean to find out who robbed my uncle, and whether Squire Bates had anything to do with it. If I could only recover the money I should be happy."

CHAPTER VIII.

DEAN BECOMES HIS OWN MASTER.

Dean didn't see his employer till the next morning. Mr. Kirby did not ask him where he had spent the evening previous, as Dean thought it possible he might do. Indeed, he seemed in unusual good spirits, and handed his new clerk a couple of dollars to defray any expenses he might incur.

Late in the evening Dean started for Chicago with Mr. Kirby, and two days later the two registered at the Commercial Hotel, corner of Lake and Dearborn Streets. Dean enjoyed the journey. He caught sight of the famous falls of Niagara, and would like to have stopped for a few hours there to see the cataract at his leisure, but of course didn't venture to make such a request of

Mr. Kirby, who, as he knew, was traveling for his own purposes, not for the gratification of his private secretary.

At the Commercial Hotel Dean and his employer occupied the same room. They remained in the Lake City for a week.

Dean's labors were very light, being confined to the writing of four letters, one of which is subjoined as a specimen. It was addressed to a certain John Carver, of San Francisco. It ran thus:

"DEAR SIR: You may sell out the two hundred shares of mining stock which you hold of mine as soon as a satisfactory price can be obtained. I think I ought to get twenty dollars per share, but will accept eighteen if you think it best. The amount you can deposit to my credit in the Bank of Nevada.

"Yours truly,

PETER KIRBY."

Kirby watched Dean's face when he was writing this letter. It was intended for effect simply, and to dispel the suspicions of his young secretary. But Dean had been gaining rapidly in knowledge of the world, and especially in the knowledge of his employer, and he had little belief in his mining property.

"Shall I mail the letter for you, Mr. Kirby?" asked the young secretary.

"No; I shall be going out myself," answered his employer. "You may hand me the letter when you have put it in the envelope."

Kirby carelessly dropped the letter into his pocket, and when Dean was out of the way he destroyed it. It was never intended to be mailed.

"The boy looks skeptical," said Kirby to himself, as he sent Dean to the office to buy a postage stamp. "It isn't easy to pull the wool over his eyes. I must get rid of him, and that soon."

Two days later Dean and his employer reached a small town in Iowa which we will call Clifton. They passed the night at the American Hotel, and occupied a room with two beds. Kirby arose first in the morning, and went out, leaving Dean asleep.

When the boy awoke he arose and dressed himself. He was putting on his coat, when he noticed an open letter addressed to Kirby which had fallen on the floor. Dean picked it up, and was about to put it away to return to Kirby, when his eye caught the postmark "Waterford," and the signature Renwick Bates.

Though under ordinary circumstances Dean would not have felt justified in reading a letter not addressed to himself, the peculiar circumstances, and the suspicion he entertained relative to the share these two men probably had in the robbery of his uncle, decided him to take advantage of the opportunity which presented itself to him of acquiring some information on the subject.

This was the letter which Dean read with an interest that may be imagined:

"FRIEND KIRBY: I have not received the government bonds which you purchased with the bills I gave you to dispose of. How did you send them? I cannot understand how such a package could have miscarried if properly addressed and forwarded with suitable precautions. I shall hold you responsible for them, and say emphatically that I regard the failure to reach me as something strange and mysterious. I do not like to express distrust, but I require you to send me the receipt of the express company to whom you committed the package.

"In regard to the boy Dean you understand my wishes. I don't wish him to return to Waterford. It will be easy to get him into trouble at such a distance from home that he will find it hard to get back. You can write me a letter which I can show at my discretion to his friends, which will discredit any stories he may invent about you or myself.

"RENWICK BATES."

Dean read this letter with eager interest. He felt that it would

be a formidable proof against Squire Bates, and he carefully concealed it in his inside vest pocket.

"So Mr. Kirby means to get me into trouble," he soliloquized. "I shall have to be on my guard."

Dean went below and took breakfast, not being in the habit of waiting for his employer. Mr. Kirby entered the breakfast-room as he was leaving it.

"We take the ten o'clock train," he said, briefly. "Don't leave the hotel."

"All right, sir; I'll stay in the office."

At ten o'clock they stepped on board a western bound train. Dean feared that Kirby would miss his letter, and make inquiries about it, but its loss appeared not to have been discovered. They took seats, and the train started. Dean caught Kirby regarding him with a peculiar gaze, and it made him uneasy. Was he devising some plot, of which Dean was to be the victim?

Two hours later the train had traversed fifty miles. The train boy came through the car, carrying a supply of the latest novels. Kirby was not in general much of a reader, but on this occasion he stopped the boy, and looked over his books.

"I think I will take this book," he said, selecting a Pinkerton detective story.

"I sell a good many of that series," said the boy, glibly.

Kirby put his hand into his pocket, and withdrew it with a startled expression.

"I can't find my pocketbook," he said.

Several of the passengers looked around, and apprehensively felt for their own wallets.

"When did you have it last, sir?" asked an old gentleman in the next seat.

"At the Clifton railroad station, sir. I bought tickets there."

"Are you sure you put back the wallet into your pocket?"

"Yes, I am positive."

"There must be a pickpocket on the train, then."

"But I haven't exposed myself," said Kirby, puzzled. "I took my seat here, with my boy, and have not stirred since."

"Your son, I suppose?"

"No; he is a boy in my employ."

"Humph!" said the old man, eyeing Dean dubiously.

Dean heard these words, and he exclaimed, indignantly: "I am not a thief, if that is what the gentleman means."

"Of course not," said Kirby, soothingly. "Still, just to convince him now, you may as well search your pockets."

Dean thrust his hand into his right-hand pocket (he wore a sack coat), and it came in contact with something unexpected. He drew it out, with the lost pocketbook in it.

"Is it possible?" ejaculated Kirby.

"Just what I thought!" said the old man, nodding emphatically.

"I wouldn't have believed it," said Kirby.

"Mr. Kirby," said Dean, his face flaming with indignation, "do you mean to charge me with taking that pocketbook?"

"What else can I think? Oh, Dean, I am grieved to find you dishonest."

"I know nothing of how it came into my pocket," said Dean, hotly; "but I suspect."

"What do you suspect?"

"That you put it there to get me into trouble."

"You hear him!" said Kirby, turning to the old man.

"What shameless effrontery!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "I don't know what the world is coming to. Have you ever missed anything before, sir?"

"Two or three articles of jewelry," answered Kirby, "but it never occurred to me to suspect the boy."

"It seems pretty clear now."

"Yes, I should say so."

Meanwhile, Dean, with flushed and angry countenance, looked from one face to another, but everywhere he met looks of distrust. It was clear that the majority of the passengers believed him guilty. He understood now the nature of the plot against him, and the letter in his pocket would be a sufficient proof. But he did not wish to produce it. He chose rather to keep it on account of the evidence which it contained against Squire Bates.

"What shall you do about it?" asked the old gentleman, who seemed to feel particularly hostile against Dean.

"I don't know," answered Kirby, hesitating.

"The boy ought to be punished. If it were my case, I would have him arrested."

"No, I don't care to do that. He belongs to a respectable family."

"Surely you won't keep him in your employ?"

"No, I shall feel compelled to discharge him. Dean, you can leave the car at the next station. You are no longer in my employ. For the sake of your uncle and aunt, I shall not have you arrested, but I must decline to employ you any longer."

"Very well, sir!" answered Dean. "If you will pay me what you owe me for services, I will leave you."

"Pay you what I owe you!" replied Kirby, as if surprised.

"Yes, sir; you promised me twenty-five dollars per month, and I have been with you three weeks."

"You have received money from me at different times, and I owe you nothing. Besides, the jewelry which you have taken will amount to more than your wages."

"Mr. Kirby, I have taken no jewelry, and you know it."

"How can you tolerate the boy's impudence?" said the old man.

Kirby shrugged his shoulders.

"I have been very much deceived in him," he answered; "but I cherish no revengeful feelings. I hope he may see the error of his ways, and resolve to lead an honest life."

"You are too merciful, sir."

"It may be so; but he is young, and there is hope of his repentance."

"Mr. Kirby, do I understand that you wish me to leave you?" asked Dean.

"Yes. You had better get out at the next station. Here is a dollar. I don't want to leave you altogether penniless. Of course, I must report what has happened to Squire Bates, who stood sponsor to you."

The train began to slow up, for the next station was near at hand.

"I don't want the dollar," said Dean. "I understand your object in accusing me of theft. I could clear myself now if I chose, but I am willing to wait."

Dean arose from his seat, and with flushed cheeks and head erect walked to the end of the car, and stepped out on the platform. He stood there, and watched the departure of the train, bearing his late employer farther west. He did not even know the name of the station at which he had disembarked.

CHAPTER IX.

A FRIEND—IN NEED.

The suddenness with which Dean found himself cast adrift, and thrown upon his own resources, was enough to take away his breath. As merchants from time to time take account of stock, he felt that it would be wise, now that he was about to set up for himself, to ascertain the extent of his means.

He thrust his hand into his pocket, and drew out a small

collection of silver coins and pennies. All told he found he had but sixty-seven cents, and he was probably twelve hundred miles from home. The chances were that it would cost him at least three cents a mile, or thirty-six dollars, to get back to Waterford. He would have been glad to have the thirty-six dollars, but he had no intention of going back until he could carry something with him. He did not want to acknowledge that he had made a failure.

Dean ascertained that the town in which he was stranded (for he hadn't money enough to get out of it) was Granville. The village appeared to be half a mile away, and might at a rough guess contain a thousand inhabitants. Like most small Western towns, it consisted of one main street, with short side streets opening out of it. For a place of the size it seemed to be wide-awake and enterprising, more so than a village of corresponding population at the East.

After spending a few minutes at the depot, Dean took his valise and trudged on in the direction of the town. What he should do when he got there he hardly knew. He was ready for anything that might turn up, and he did not worry as much as he would if he had been twice as old.

Dean had accomplished about half the distance when a voice hailed him, "Halloa, youngster!"

Dean turned in the direction of the voice and his glance fell on a man of perhaps twenty-five, who was stretched comfortably under a tree by the roadside. He had a knapsack and wore a velveteen suit. Something in his appearance gave Dean the impression that he was an actor.

Responding to his greeting, which was accompanied by a pleasant smile, Dean answered, "Good-day!"

"Where are you traveling, young chap?"

"I don't know," responded Dean. "I suppose I am on my way to the village."

"Do you live about here?"

"No, I live in New York State."

"So do I, when I'm at home, but I'm not often at home."

"Are you an actor?"

"That's what I call myself. That's what I am styled by admiring friends, though some of the critics are unkind enough to express doubts. At present I am in hard luck. I came west with a dramatic company which has gone to pieces. I am traveling homeward on my uppers. Permit me to introduce myself," and he doffed a soft hat which he wore, "as Cecil Montgomery, not wholly unknown to the metropolitan stage."

There was something attractive in his good-humored recklessness that impressed Dean favorably.

"My name is Dean Dunham," he responded, "not known on any stage."

"Excuse the impertinence, but are you a young man of fortune?"

"Yes, if you call sixty-seven cents a fortune."

"Dean, my boy, you have ten cents the advantage of me. If you have any plans that with our united capital we may be able to carry out, my wealth is at your service."

"I have no plans except to get something to eat," said Dean.

"I am with you there," said the actor, rising with alacrity from his recumbent position. "Know you of a hostelry?"

"If that means a restaurant, I think we may find one in the village."

"Wisely guessed. If you have no objection to my company, we will walk together."

"I shall be glad of your company, Mr. Montgomery."

"You do me proud, Mr. Dunham," and the actor once more doffed his hat, and bowed low. "If you don't mind, my boy,

suppose you tell me what brings you out here, so far from home? I came with a combination, as I have explained."

"I came as private secretary with a gentleman—no, a man named Kirby. He chose to charge me with stealing his pocket-book, and discharged me on the train, refusing to pay me back wages."

"Steal—with that honest face! Why, I'd trust you with my entire wealth—fifty-seven cents—and wouldn't lose a minute's sleep."

"Thank you," said Dean, smiling. "I hope I deserve your confidence."

"So it seems that we are both in very much the same plight. We must hustle for a living. I wish you were an actor."

"Why?"

"We might give a joint performance, and so pick up a few pennies. Can you play on any instrument?"

Dean drew a harmonica from his pocket and displayed it.

"I can play a little on this," he said.

"Give us a taste of your quality."

Dean put the harmonica in his mouth and played several popular airs in very creditable style. He had practiced considerably in Waterford, and when he left home chanced to bring his favorite instrument with him.

Mr. Montgomery applauded vociferously.

"That's capital!" he said. "I have an idea. Our fortune is made."

"Is it? I'm very glad to hear it."

"Let me explain. I am a dramatic Jack-of-all-trades. I can sing, dance, recite and give imitations. Why shouldn't we give a joint exhibition? I venture to say we can charm and astonish the good people of Granville, and gather in golden shekels for ourselves."

"But what am I to do?"

"Listen. You are the world-renowned Dean Dunham, the champion player on the harmonica, who has charmed tens of thousands, and whose name is a household word from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Do you understand?"

"I shall begin to think I am a humbug."

"So be it! Humbug makes money and rides at ease, while modest merit goes barefoot and tramps over dusty roads."

"That is complimentary to us, for it happens to be our condition just at present."

"Then let us abandon it! It doesn't pay. Will you join me, and try your luck with the good people of Granville?"

Dean hesitated a moment, but only a moment. He must do something, and nothing else seemed to present itself. If any one chose to pay for the privilege of hearing him play on the harmonica, he had no objection to receiving the money. Besides, he would be at no trouble in the matter. Mr. Montgomery would make all arrangements, and he would only have to take the part that might be assigned him.

"I am at your service, Mr. Montgomery."

"Your hand on it! We will, we must be successful. In after years, when fame and money are yours, think that it was I, Cecil Montgomery, who assisted you to make your *début*."

"I certainly will, Mr. Montgomery," said Dean, falling into his companion's humor.

By this time they had reached the village. A sign over a small one-story building attracted their attention.

RESTAURANT
AND
COFFEE HOUSE.

"Let us enter," said the actor. "It is astonishing what an appetite I have. If we are to give an entertainment we must be fed."

Fortunately the prices at the restaurant and coffee house were very moderate, and the two travelers were able to make a plentiful meal, though it reduced their stock of money almost to nothing. After dinner Mr. Montgomery indulged in a five-cent cigar, but Dean declined to smoke.

"Stay here, Dean," said his companion. "I hear there is a weekly paper published in Granville. I will see the editor, and ask him to join us in the speculation, sharing the profits. The paper appears to-morrow. He can give us a big puff that will insure our success."

"Suppose he won't do it?"

"Leave it to me! I have a most persuasive tongue. Granville must not let such an opportunity slip. It must see me act and listen to your melodious strains."

Nearly an hour passed. Then Montgomery came back radiant. "It's all fixed," he said. "You make your *début* to-morrow evening. I have engaged board at the hotel for us both."

CHAPTER X.

DEAN'S DEBUT.

The next morning the *Granville Weekly Palladium* appeared, containing a flaming notice of the forthcoming entertainment, in which the merits of the two performers were extolled in the highest terms. Dean opened his eyes in amazement when he read the following tribute to himself:

"At immense expense the services of

DEAN DUNHAM,

the Champion Harmonica player of America, have been secured. This young performer, still only a boy in years, will spend the next season in Europe, having been offered engagements in London, Paris and Vienna, and he is now playing a farewell series of engagements in his native land. Probably the citizens of Granville may never again have the opportunity of hearing him."

"What do you say to that, Dean, my boy?" asked Montgomery, nudging him in the side.

"It makes me feel foolish, Mr. Montgomery," said Dean, blushing. "If it should be read in Waterford the people would never get through laughing at me."

"They won't read it, my boy, unless it turns out true."

"Turns out true?"

"Yes. I believe you can win popularity by your playing. We can tell better this time to-morrow. If you do, how can we tell but the rest may also come true?"

"If it were the violin or the banjo! But a little cheap harmonica!"

"Never mind what the instrument is if you know how to handle it. Now let me tell you one thing that will encourage you: I think we are going to have a big house."

"What makes you think so?"

"There hasn't been an entertainment in Granville for several weeks. The people are hungry to be amused. They patronize performances like ours much better in the West than in the East. There the people are more humdrum and steady going. Here they are more excitable."

"It seems ridiculous, my playing for money!"

"How much money have you in your pocket?"

"Five cents."

"Then it strikes me it would be more ridiculous not playing for money. Whatever talents we possess our Creator meant us to exercise for our benefit and the pleasure of the community."

"At any rate, I'll do my best."

"Then you'll do all I ask. By the way, I am going to have you take the tickets this evening, up to the time of the performance. It will save money, and draw public attention."

"I can do that, at any rate."

The hall in which the entertainment was to take place contained about four hundred people. When eight o'clock struck it was packed, many having come from neighboring towns. The price of admission was thirty-five cents for adults, and twenty-five for children. It was clear, therefore, that the receipts must be considerably over a hundred dollars. The rent of the hall being but ten dollars, this allowed a large margin for profit.

Punctually at eight o'clock the entertainment commenced with a brief introductory speech from Mr. Montgomery.

"Gentlemen and ladies," he said, "it has long been the desire of Mr. Dunham and myself to appear in your beautiful village, and at length our wishes are to be gratified. We shall do our utmost to please you, and if we fail, think that it is our ability and not our will that is lacking. I will commence with a humorous recitation, in the character of an old darkey."

He disappeared behind the screen, and emerged in a very short time disguised as a Southern negro.

This impersonation hit the popular taste. It was followed by a song, and then Mr. Montgomery introduced Dean in a highly flattering manner.

Dean appeared with a flushed face, and a momentary feeling of trepidation. Making a bow to the audience, he struck up the favorite melody of the day. He really played very well, the excitement of playing before an audience helping rather than interfering with him, and his performance was greeted with hearty and long-continued applause. At Mr. Montgomery's suggestion he gratified the audience with an encore.

"You have done yourself proud, Dean, my boy," said Montgomery, when Dean retired behind the screen. "Our entertainment is a success. Our audience is good-natured."

"I can't help thinking how the folks at home would be surprised if they knew I was performing in public," said Dean, smiling.

"And making money out of it. That's where the best part comes in. Follow up your success, my boy. I shall go out twice and then call on you again."

The next time Dean appeared with confidence, being satisfied that the audience were friendly. His second appearance was equally satisfactory, and he was compelled to blush when he overheard one school girl on the front row of benches whisper to another, "Isn't he sweet?"

"It seems to me I am learning a good deal about myself," thought Dean. "I must take care not to get conceited."

The dual entertainment lasted about an hour and a half, Mr. Montgomery, of course, using up the lion's share of the time. At last it concluded, and Dean and his companion gathered up the money and went home. The profits over and above expenses amounted to eighty dollars, of which the editor, according to the agreement, received forty per cent., or thirty-two dollars. The remainder, forty-eight dollars, was divided equally between Dean and Mr. Montgomery. As the hotel charge was but a dollar a day for each, they felt handsomely compensated for their exertions.

CHAPTER XI.

DEAN LOSES HIS PARTNER.

When the two partners returned to the hotel with the proceeds of the entertainment in their pockets, they were in high spirits.

"I feel as rich as Vanderbilt," said Montgomery, in exultation.

"And I feel like an Astor or a Gould," chimed in Dean. "Peter Kirby did me a good turn when he discharged me."

"Dean, you are a star! I had no idea of your talent."

"Don't flatter me, Mr. Montgomery," said Dean, blushing. "You will make me self-conceited. I was lucky in falling in with you."

"Well said, my boy! I see you don't grudge me my share of the credit. We will keep on, will we not?"

"As long as there is any money in it."

"Precisely. Your hand on that."

In pursuance of this agreement, three evenings later they gave an entertainment in the town of Cameron, twenty miles away. Circumstances were not as favorable, but they divided twenty dollars net profits.

For three weeks the combination continued to give entertainments, arranging from two to three a week. They did not again meet with the success which had greeted them at Granville, but in almost every case they made expenses, and a fair sum besides. At the end of this time, each of the partners found himself possessed of about forty dollars.

At the close of a concert at a small town in Missouri, on returning to the hotel, Mr. Montgomery chanced to take up a copy of the New York *Herald* in the office. He ran over the advertisements on the first page, including the "Personals," when all at once his color changed, and he looked agitated.

"What's the matter, Mr. Montgomery?" asked Dean.

"Bad news, my boy!" said the actor, sadly. "Look at that!" Dean read the following among the personals:

"CECIL MONTGOMERY, JR. Come home at once! Your mother is very sick."

"My poor old mother!" said the actor, feelingly. "She may be dead by this time. Why couldn't I have seen this notice before?"

"What is the date of the paper?" asked Dean.

"It is five days old."

"I suppose you will go at once."

"Yes, I must. I never would forgive myself if I did not hurry home on the chance of seeing the dear old mother once more."

"You are right, Mr. Montgomery. I would do the same if I were fortunate enough to have a mother living."

"Of course that ends our partnership for the present. Will you go home with me, Dean?"

Dean shook his head.

"No, I have nothing to go home to. It would take all my money, and there would be nothing for me to do in Waterford."

"But you can't give entertainments alone."

"I can make my living somehow. I have forty dollars, and that would last me some time, even if I got nothing to do."

When Dean bade his companion good-by at the station the next morning, and turned away, a forlorn feeling came over him, and he felt tempted to take the next train East himself. But the thought of going back to Waterford as poor as he started, and with no prospect of employment, braced him up, and he resolved to push on westward and take his chances. He returned to the hotel, and sat down to consider his plans.

There a pleasant surprise awaited him.

"There's a gentleman to see you, Mr. Dunham," said the clerk.

"Where is he?" asked Dean.

"He went out to make a call in the village, but will be back in fifteen minutes. This is his card."

Dean took the card in his hand, and read the name:

SAMUEL GUNNISON.

"Any acquaintance of yours?" asked the clerk.

"No; I never heard the name."

"I think he wants you to play to-morrow evening. He lives in the next town, Carterville."

"Mr. Montgomery has been called East. I am afraid this will stop our entertainments."

"He did not ask for Mr. Montgomery, only for you!"

Mr. Gunnison soon came in. He was a slender, dark-complexioned man, with a pleasant face.

"I know you are Dean Dunham," he said, extending his hand, "for I heard you play last evening. Are you engaged for to-morrow?"

"No, sir."

"Then I should like to engage your services. An entertainment is to be given in our town hall for the benefit of our town library. For the most part local talent is employed. We are to have a short play, and a few songs. I, as manager, have thought it would help us if we could advertise you in connection with the home attractions."

"I shall be glad to make an engagement," said Dean, pleasantly.

"What would be your terms?" asked Mr. Gunnison, a little anxiously.

"How much can you afford to pay me?" asked Dean.

"We would not think of offering a player of your reputation less than ten dollars if it were not desirable to make expenses as small as possible, but——"

"Under the circumstances," said Dean, interrupting him, "I will be willing to come for five."

"Thank you, Mr. Dunham. You are very kind," said Mr. Gunnison, warmly, grasping our hero by the hand. "I will try to make it up to you. Instead of going to the hotel you shall be my guest, and your expenses will be nothing. If you are ready I will take you over at once. I have a buggy at the door."

"Thank you, sir, I will accept your kind invitation."

So Dean, feeling less lonesome than he did, secured his valise, and taking a seat beside his new friend, rode in the direction of Carterville. He was destined to meet an old acquaintance there.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

Mr. Gunnison had several children, including one boy of about Dean's age, who was disposed at first to regard our hero with distant respect as a professional star, but soon became intimate with him on finding that Dean had the same tastes as himself. This appeared to surprise him.

"I say," he remarked, "I thought you wouldn't have anything to say to a fellow like me."

"Why not?" asked Dean, innocently.

"Oh, because you're a big gun."

"How's that?"

"You give concerts, and have your name in the papers."

"Oh!" said Dean, smiling; "I have to do that for a living, you know. I'm only a boy after all."

Evening came, and Dean was called upon to play at four different points in the entertainment.

Dean was stimulated to do his best, as he did not wish his new friends to be disappointed. During the day he practiced "Home, Sweet Home" with variations, partly original, partly remembered from a performance to which he had listened at a public entertainment a year or two previous. His efforts were crowned with success. The applause was tumultuous, and Dean was compelled to repeat his performance.

He did so, but toward the close he nearly broke down in con-

sequence of a surprising discovery that he made. In looking around the audience, not far from the center aisle his glance chanced to fall upon a face which he had the best cause to remember.

It was no other than Mr. Peter Kirby, whose presence will be afterward explained.

Mr. Kirby on his part was even more amazed to find the country boy whom he had left to his own resources emerging in such a conspicuous manner into public notice. He had thought of Dean as wandering about the country a forlorn and penniless tramp, begging for charity. How on earth he had managed to achieve the position of a musical star performer he could not imagine.

"That boy is getting dangerous," thought he. "If the captain knew of his success he would feel very nervous."

Mr. Kirby was in Carterville as the guest of Dr. Sidney Thorp, a wealthy gentleman, into whose good graces he had ingratiated himself at a hotel where they chanced to meet. He had accepted Dr. Thorp's invitation to spend a couple of days at his house, with the intention of robbing his hospitable entertainer if he should have the opportunity.

"A remarkable young performer!" said Dr. Thorp, as Dean closed his playing.

"Yes," assented Kirby, absently. "How does he happen to be here?"

"He had been giving an entertainment in a town near by, in connection with a variety actor. Our committee, finding that he gave satisfaction, invited him to play here this evening."

"Do you pay him anything?"

"Certainly," answered Dr. Thorp, with surprise. "We couldn't expect to obtain a performer of so much talent gratuitously."

Kirby opened his eyes in surprise at hearing his quondam secretary spoken of in such terms.

"Do you know how much he is to be paid?"

"I believe he agreed to come for five dollars, considering that the entertainment was for a charitable purpose."

Kirby could scarcely refrain from whistling, so great was his surprise.

He recognized Dean some time before his former secretary's glance fell upon him. Dean's start showed that the recognition was mutual.

"I am going to speak to this boy—Dean Dunham," said he, to Dr. Thorp, when the entertainment was at an end.

"Mr. Gunnison will introduce you. Shall I ask him?"

"I need no introduction. That boy and I have met."

Dean was standing on the platform watching the departing audience, when he saw Mr. Kirby approaching. He felt a little nervous, not knowing what the intentions of his old employer might be.

Kirby paused a moment, and a peculiar smile overspread his countenance.

"I presume you remember me?" he said.

"Yes," answered Dean, coldly.

"I am rather surprised to meet you again under such circumstances."

"I am rather surprised myself—at the circumstances."

"You have become quite a star!" said Kirby, with a sneer.

Dean answered gravely, "I had to make a living in some way. It was an accident, my trying this way."

"Would you like to return to me—as my secretary?"

"Thank you, Mr. Kirby, I prefer to travel independently."

"Suppose I should tell why I discharged you? That might prove inconvenient to you."

"Then I should have a story to tell that might prove inconvenient to you, Mr. Kirby."

Dean looked Kirby straight in the face, and the latter saw that he no longer had an inexperienced country boy to deal with, but one who might prove dangerous to his plans.

"On the whole," he said, after a pause, "suppose we both keep silence as to the past."

"I will do so, unless I should have occasion to speak."

No one was near enough to listen to this conversation. Now Dr. Thorp came up, and Kirby said with an abrupt turn of the conversation, "I am glad to have met you again, my young friend. I wish you success."

Dean bowed gravely, but didn't speak. He was not prepared to wish success to Peter Kirby, knowing what he did of him.

During the evening Dr. Thorp called at the house of Mr. Gunnison, but unaccompanied by his guest. Dean had heard meanwhile at whose house Kirby was staying, and he felt that he ought to drop a hint that would put the unsuspecting host on his guard. He finally decided that it was his duty to do so.

"May I speak with you a moment in private, Dr. Thorp?" he asked, as the guest arose to go.

"Certainly," answered the doctor, in some surprise.

Dean accompanied him into the hall.

"Do you know much of the gentleman who is staying at your house?" asked Dean.

"No; why do you ask?"

"Because I have reason to think that he is a professional thief."

"Good heavens! What do you mean?"

Dean briefly related to the doctor his suspicions.

"Thank you, Mr. Dunham," said Dr. Thorp, warmly. "You have done me a great service. I happen to have a considerable sum in money and bonds at my house. I shall look out for Mr. Kirby," he added, with a grim nod.

CHAPTER XIII.

DR. THORP'S CABINET.

Dr. Thorp had been pleased with Peter Kirby, who had laid himself out to be agreeable, and the doctor was far from suspecting his real character. When this was revealed to him by Dean, he quickly decided to test it for himself.

Some men, inclined to be nervous and timid, would have had their apprehensions excited, and dreaded an encounter with a professional criminal. But Dr. Thorp was cool, resolute and determined. He proposed to facilitate Kirby's designs, and catch him in a trap.

When he reached home he found Kirby smoking on the piazza.

"Have you been taking a walk, doctor?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Dr. Thorp. "I made a call on a neighbor. I hope you have not been lonesome."

"Oh, no! Your daughter has enabled me to pass the time pleasantly. But I am glad to see you back."

Had Kirby known that Dr. Thorp had had an interview with Dean Dunham, his anxiety would have been excited.

"By the way, doctor," said Kirby, with apparent carelessness, "I have a little money to invest. Can you recommend any form of investment?"

"You might buy a house in the village and settle down. I believe the next estate is for sale."

"It would certainly be an inducement to become your neighbor," said Kirby, politely; "but I am a rolling stone. I am always traveling. I couldn't content myself in any one place, not even in a large city."

"I suspect your mode of life makes frequent removals necessary," thought Dr. Thorp, though he did not say so.

"Well, if you don't care to invest in real estate," he said, a moment later, "you might purchase government bonds or railroad securities."

"To which do you give the preference?" asked Kirby.

The doctor smiled inwardly. He saw that Kirby was trying to ascertain whether he had any negotiable securities in his possession, but he was ready to play into his hands.

"Well," he said, "I think well of both."

"I had some government bonds at one time," said Kirby, "but they were stolen. That has made me cautious."

"Perhaps you were careless."

"No doubt I was. I kept them in a trunk at my boarding house. I presume you wouldn't venture, even in a quiet village like this, to keep bonds in your house?"

"Oh, yes, we never receive visits from thieves or burglars. I don't consider trunks so safe as—that cabinet."

He pointed to a black walnut cabinet with several drawers standing in one corner of the room.

Kirby's face lighted up. He had got the information he desired, but he resumed his indifferent manner.

"I think you are right," he said. "Besides, in a town like Carterville, as you say, thieves are hardly likely to be found."

"Oh, dear, no!" said Dr. Thorp, yawning. "I have no occasion to borrow trouble on that score."

"Living as I generally do in large cities, where members of the criminal class abound," said Kirby, "I am naturally more suspicious than you. I confess I wish I lived in a place of Arcadian innocence like this."

Dr. Thorp smiled. He was amused to hear one whom he believed to be a professional thief discourse in this manner.

"You might find it dull," he said, a little satirically. "It would lack the spice and excitement of wickedness."

At a little after eleven Kirby signified that he was tired and was conducted to his bedchamber. Dr. Thorp remained behind, and opening the lower drawer of his cabinet removed therefrom a roll of bank bills and a five-hundred-dollar government bond.

"I think these will be safe in my trunk to-night," he said, to himself. "Now, Mr. Kirby, you can explore the cabinet at your leisure. I doubt if you will find enough to repay you for your trouble."

Kirby occupied a chamber just over the sitting-room. He didn't undress himself, but threw himself on the bed to snatch a little rest.

"I found out very cleverly where the doctor kept his bonds," he soliloquized. "He is an innocent, unsuspicious man, luckily for me. So no thieves or burglars ever visit Carterville," he repeated, with a soft laugh. "The good doctor would have been mightily surprised had he known the character of the man with whom he was talking. It is hardly a credit to take in a simple-minded man like the doctor. I very much regret the necessity of repaying his hospitality as I shall, but I need the bonds more than he does."

Kirby did not allow himself to sleep. There was important work to be done, and he must not run the risk of oversleeping himself.

He waited impatiently till he heard the public clock strike midnight, then taking off his shoes descended in his stocking feet to the sitting-room. There stood the cabinet plainly visible in the glorious moonlight that flooded the room, making artificial light unnecessary.

"It's an easy job for a man of my experience to open it,"

thought Kirby. "I hope the doctor is sound asleep. He looks like a man who is safe to sleep all night."

From his pocket he produced a bunch of skeleton keys, which he at once set himself to use. The lock on the drawer of the cabinet was a simple one, presenting no difficulty, and in less than five minutes he opened the upper drawer. A glance satisfied him that it contained nothing that he could make available. In turn he opened the other drawers, with equal ill success.

"The doctor must have fooled me!" he muttered, impatiently, "or is there some secret drawer that I have overlooked?"

This question he asked himself, but he was far from expecting an answer.

"You have examined the cabinet pretty thoroughly, Mr. Kirby," said a cool, calm voice.

Kirby sprang to his feet in wild dismay. There, looking at him from the doorway, was Dr. Thorp, his host, whom he was conspiring to rob.

"You are an early riser, are you not, Mr. Kirby?" said the doctor, composedly.

Kirby quickly decided upon his course.

"Where am I?" he asked, passing his hand over his face in a bewildered way.

"Where are you? Don't you recognize the room? A more pertinent query would be, 'What are you doing?'"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Kirby—"I—I see it now. That unfortunate habit of walking in my sleep! What can you think of me?"

"Do you generally carry skeleton keys about with you when you walk in your sleep, Mr. Kirby?" asked the doctor, pointedly.

"I—I really don't know how to explain," stammered Kirby.

"These keys I found in my room on the morning after I was robbed. I took them with me, thinking they might be of use if I should lose my regular keys."

"Very ingeniously explained, upon my word!"

"It isn't possible, Dr. Thorp, that you really take me for a thief! I hope you have more confidence in me."

"Well, it really did occur to me that you were a professional burglar. Your last words which I overheard before intruding upon you seem to bear out that supposition."

"What were they?"

"Is there some secret drawer that I have overlooked? Perhaps you will do me the favor to explain them."

"I can't. They were spoken unconsciously, I assure you. This habit of walking in my sleep has got me into trouble several times before."

"Then take my advice and discontinue it."

"I will. I should have asked you to lock me in my chamber if I could have foreseen what has happened."

"Mr. Kirby," said Dr. Thorp, sternly, "you must think I am a simpleton to be taken in by such a transparent falsehood. I was deceived in you, I admit, but now I understand your real character. I won't have you arrested, though I ought, but I require you to leave my house at once."

"In the middle of the night?" said Kirby, in dismay.

"Yes. I cannot agree to shelter you even for the balance of the night."

"Tell me one thing," said Kirby, changing his tone; "did any one put you on your guard against me?"

"Yes."

"It was Dean Dunham."

"You can form your own conclusions."

"That is all you need tell me. I understand it all. I will go to my room and secure my luggage, and then bid you good-by."

"I will wait for you."

"I owe you another debt, Dean Dunham!" said Kirby, as he left the house with the pleasant prospect of a sleepless night.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LONELY CABIN.

Dean had left the breakfast table the next morning, and was considering what would be the next stage of his journey when Dr. Thorp was announced.

"Mr. Dunham," he said, "I have come to thank you for your warning of last evening."

"I hope it was of service to you, sir."

"It was of essential service. Your old acquaintance had planned to rob me of a sum of money and a quantity of government bonds, but being on my guard I was able to frustrate his designs."

"How did it happen?" asked Mr. Gunnison, his curiosity excited.

"In the middle of the night, or rather a little after midnight, I heard some one going downstairs softly. I followed unobserved, and caught my guest opening the drawers in my cabinet."

"Where is he now?"

"I ordered him out of the house. He stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once. Where he is now I cannot inform you, but presume he has placed several miles between himself and Carterville. Fortunately, he went empty-handed, and my money and bonds are still in my possession. But for our young friend here I should hardly be able to say that."

"You are indebted to me for bringing him to Carterville, Dr. Thorp," said Mr. Gunnison, in a jocular tone. "How much are you going to allow me?"

"You are amply repaid by his services," said the doctor, "judging from the comments I have heard upon his performance. I am under obligations to him, however, which I ought to acknowledge. Mr. Dunham," he continued, taking from his pocket a small gold watch and chain, "I see you have no watch. Please accept this with my best wishes."

It was an Elgin gold watch of neat pattern which he offered to Dean.

"It is not quite new," proceeded the doctor. "I bought it of a young man in need of money, and having paid him its full value I have no scruple in giving it away."

"Thank you very much," said Dean, his face showing the satisfaction he felt. "I have felt the need of a watch ever since I began to travel, but never dreamed of anything better than a silver one. I shall be very proud of this one."

"And I am very glad to give it to you. In what direction do you propose to journey?"

"Westward, sir. I haven't any very clear ideas further than that."

"Shall you go as far as Colorado?"

"Yes, sir; I think so."

"I have a nephew out there somewhere—Henry Thorp—a young man of twenty-five. He is probably mining, but I don't know his location. Should you run across him, ask him to communicate with me. His aunt and myself will be glad to hear from him."

"I will not forget it, sir," said Dean, though he thought it quite improbable that he and the nephew referred to would ever meet.

Dr. Thorp took his leave, and Dean soon after took leave of the Gunnison family.

A week later found Dean only a hundred miles farther on his way. He might have accomplished this distance on the cars in a few hours, but he preferred to make a leisurely trip, looking out for a chance to earn money on the way. But after a season of prosperity a dull time had come to him. During the week he did not make a single dollar. He encountered several fair-sized towns, but did not feel able to give an entire entertainment himself. His stock of money dwindled, and he began to feel anxious.

Toward nightfall he found himself apparently at a distance from any town, and began to feel some solicitude as to where he could pass the night. It was a mountain region, and the day seemed to be shorter than on the plains. The air was chilly, and Dean felt that it would be dangerous to spend the night out of doors.

In this emergency he was pleased to descry a rough cabin a hundred feet from the road.

"There is shelter, at any rate, if they will take me in," thought Dean. "I will take care not to wander into such a wild region again."

He went up to the door, and knocked with his bare knuckles.

He heard a shuffling noise inside, and an old woman, with gray hair, unconfined and hanging loose like a horse's mane, faced him.

"Who are you?" she inquired, abruptly.

"A traveler," answered Dean.

"What do you want?"

"I have lost my way. Can you let me stay here all night?"

"This isn't a tavern," she responded, in a surly tone.

"I suppose not, but I am willing to pay for supper and a lodging. I don't see any other houses near by, or I would not trouble you."

The old woman eyed him with a curious scrutiny which made him vaguely uncomfortable, so weird and uncanny was her look.

"Have you got any money?" she asked, at last.

"A little," answered Dean, growing suddenly cautious.

"Well, you can come in," she said, after a pause.

Dean entered, and cast a glance about him.

The cabin was certainly a primitive one. What furniture it contained seemed home made, put together awkwardly with such material as came to hand. In place of chairs were two boxes, such as are used to contain shoes, placed bottom up. There was a small stove, the heat of which seemed grateful to the chilly young traveler.

"It is cold," remarked Dean, by way of opening the conversation.

"Humph!" answered the woman. "Have you come all the way to tell me that?"

"Evidently the old woman isn't sociable," thought Dean.

"Where do you live when you're to home?" asked the woman, after a pause.

"In New York State."

"What did you come out here for?"

"I had my living to make," answered Dean, feeling uncomfortable.

"I haven't found any, and I've lived here goin' on ten years. I suppose you want some supper," she continued, ungraciously.

"Yes, I am very hungry. I am sorry to put you to any trouble."

The woman did not answer, but going to a rude pantry took out a plate of meat, and some dry bread. The former she put in the oven, and proceeded to brew some tea.

Dean watched her preparations with eager interest. It seemed to him that he had never been so hungry. He had probably walked ten miles over a rough path, and the exercise had tired him as much as twice the distance on the plain. Besides, he

had his valise with him, and had found it decidedly an incumbrance.

From time to time the old woman paused in her preparations and eyed him searchingly. What it was that attracted her attention Dean could not guess till she suddenly pointed to his chain, and asked, "Is there a watch at the end of that?"

"Yes," answered Dean, with a sudden feeling of apprehension. "Let me look at it."

Reluctantly he drew out the watch, and into the woman's eyes crept a covetous gleam, as she advanced and took it in her hand. "It's pretty," she said. "What's it worth?"

"I don't know," answered Dean. "I didn't buy it. It was a present to me."

"It ought to be worth a good sum."

"I value it because it was given me by a friend," said Dean, hurriedly.

She released her hold upon the watch, and Dean put it back in his pocket, rather relieved to have recovered possession of it again.

Five minutes later the meal was ready, such as it was.

"Set up," said the woman.

Dean obeyed with alacrity.

He tasted the meat. It was not unpleasant, but the taste was peculiar.

"What kind of meat is it?" he asked.

"B'ar meat."

"Are there bears in these mountains?"

"Yes; my son killed this one. He's killed many a b'ar, Dan has. He's a master hand with the rifle. There's none that can beat him."

"Isn't it dangerous to tackle a bear?"

"No; the b'ars a nat'rally timorous animal. I've killed more'n one myself."

As Dean surveyed his hostess, he thought her quite capable of encountering a bear. Her walk and air were masculine, and there seemed nothing feminine about her.

CHAPTER XV.

DAN.

When Dean arose from the table he had made away with a large share of the repast provided.

It had grown quite dark in the deepening shadows of the hills, but it was a twilight darkness, not the darkness of midnight.

"I think I will go out and take a walk," said Dean, turning to his hostess.

"You'll come back?" she asked, with apparent anxiety.

"Yes, for I don't want to sleep out of doors. I can settle for my supper now if you wish."

"No, you can wait till morning."

"Very well!"

Dean left the house, and walked some distance over the mountain road. Finally, being a little fatigued from his day's travel and the hearty supper he had eaten, he lay down under a tree, and enjoyed the luxury of rest on a full stomach.

In the stillness of the woods it was possible to hear even a sound ordinarily indistinct. Gradually Dean became sensible of a peculiar noise which seemed like the distant murmur of voices. He looked about him in all directions, but failed to understand from where the voices proceeded. It seemed almost as if the sounds came from below. Yet this seemed absurd.

"There can't be any mine about here," reflected Dean. "If there were, I could understand a little better about the sounds."

Certainly, it was not a very likely place for a mine.

"I wonder if I am dreaming," thought Dean.

He rubbed his eyes, and satisfied himself that he was as much awake as he ever was in his life.

He got up and walked around, looking inquisitively about him, in the hope of localizing the sound. Suddenly it stopped, and all was complete silence. Then he was quite at a loss.

"I don't know what it means. I may as well lie down and rest again. I imagine my landlady won't care about seeing me before it is time to go to bed."

With this thought Dean dismissed his conjectures, and gave himself up to a pleasant reverie. He didn't worry, though his prospects were not of the best. He was nearly out of money, and there appeared no immediate prospect of earning more. Where he was he did not know, except that he was somewhere among the mountains of Colorado.

"I wish I could come across some mining settlement," thought Dean. "I couldn't buy a claim, but I could perhaps hire out to some miner, and after a while get rich enough to own one myself."

Suddenly his reflections were broken in upon by a discordant voice.

"Who are you, youngster, and where did you drop from?"

Looking up quickly, Dean's glance fell upon a rough-looking man, in hunting costume, considerably the worse for wear, with a slouched hat on his head, and a rifle in his hand. The man's face was far from prepossessing, and his manner did not strike Dean as friendly.

"My name is Dean Dunham," he said, in answer to the first question, then paused.

"How came you here?"

"I am traveling."

"Where from?"

"New York State."

"What brings a boy like you so far from home? Is there any one with you?" demanded the man, suspiciously.

"No; I wish there was. I had a companion, but he got a call to go home on account of his mother's sickness."

"And you pushed on?"

"Yes."

"What are you after—it isn't game, for you've got no gun."

"No; I'm after a chance to make a living, as much as anything."

"Couldn't you make a living at home?"

"Not one that satisfied me."

"Can you do any better here?"

"I can't tell yet," answered Dean, while an expression of genuine perplexity overspread his face. It was a question which he had often asked himself. "I think if I could come across some mining settlement I could work for myself or somebody else."

"Are you goin' to stay out all night? There ain't many hotels 'round here."

"I have had supper, and am going to spend the night at a cabin about a mile from here."

"You are!" exclaimed the hunter, in a tone of profound astonishment. "How did you get in?"

"I asked a woman who lives there if she would let me stop over night, and she was kind enough to say yes."

"Then you have had your supper?"

"Yes."

"And are you goin' to sleep in the cabin?"

"Yes. Do you live anywhere near it?"

"Well, I should smile! Youngster, that's where I live, and the woman who gave you your supper is my mother."

"Then you are Dan," said Dean, eagerly.

"How do you know my name?"

"Your mother told me you killed the bear whose meat I ate for supper."

"That's correct, youngster. I killed him, but it's nothing to kill a b'ar. I've killed hundreds of 'em."

"I should be proud if I could say I had killed one," said Dean, his eyes sparkling with excitement.

"If you stay 'round here long enough, you may have a chance. But I'm goin' home. It's growin' dark and you may as well go with me."

Dean arose from his recumbent position, and drew his watch from his pocket.

"Yes," he said, "it's past eight o'clock."

"Let me look at that watch. Is it gold?" asked his companion, and his eyes showed the same covetous gleam which Dean had noticed in the mother.

"I wish I had hidden the watch in an inside pocket," he thought, too late. "I am afraid it will be taken from me before I get away from these mountains."

"What might it be worth?" demanded the other, after fingering it curiously with his clumsy hands.

"I don't know," answered Dean, guardedly. "I did not buy it. It was given to me."

"Is it worth a hundred dollars?"

"I don't think it is. It may be worth fifty."

"Humph! are you rich?"

"No; far from it! I am a poor boy."

"That doesn't look like it."

"The watch was given to me by a rich man to whom I had done a service."

The man handed it back, but it seemed with reluctance.

"Youngster, what do you think of my mother?" he asked, abruptly.

"She treated me kindly," answered Dean, rather embarrassed.

"Did you agree to pay her for your lodging?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Mother ain't one of the soft kind. Did she strike you as an agreeable old lady?"

"I only saw her for a few minutes," said Dean, evasively.

His companion laughed, and surveyed Dean quizzically.

"You must stretch your legs, youngster, or mother'll get tired waiting for me. She might take a notion not to give me any supper."

It was not long before they came in sight of the cabin. Here a surprise, and by no means an agreeable one, awaited Dean. On a bench in front of the cabin sat a man whom he had good reason to remember, and equal reason to fear—Peter Kirby.

CHAPTER XVI.

"SHOULD OLD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT?"

If Dean was surprised to see his old enemy in such an out of the way place, Kirby was no less surprised to see his former traveling companion. There was this difference: the encounter brought him pleasure, while to Dean it carried dismay. Neither could understand where on earth the other had sprung from.

"Oho!" laughed Kirby, "so we meet again."

Dan looked surprised, thinking the words were addressed to him, but following the direction of Kirby's eyes, he saw that he was mistaken.

"Do you know this boy?" he asked.

"Do I know him? Why, we started from the East together."

"How is that?"

"It was at the request of a friend of ours."

"The captain?"

"Yes."

"And why did you separate?"

"Well, I mustn't tell tales out of school. I am very glad to meet you again, youngster. Is the pleasure mutual?"

"No, it isn't," said Dean, bluntly.

"So I should judge, after the trick you played upon me at our last meeting."

"What do you refer to?"

"You know well enough. You cautioned Dr. Thorp against me. Don't deny it, for I know it is true."

"I don't deny it. What happened that night showed that I had good reason."

"Be that as it may," said Kirby, with an ugly scowl, "you did a bad thing for yourself. You probably thought you would never meet me again."

Dean was silent, but Dan, whose curiosity was aroused, interposed with an inquiry.

"What are you two talkin' about?" he said. "Is this boy a friend or an enemy?"

"He is an enemy of our association," replied Kirby. "I am glad to have him in my power."

"So there is an association?" thought Dean. "These two men belong to it, and Squire Bates is the captain. I shall soon know all about it."

But in the meanwhile the evident hostility of Kirby, reflected in the face of his new acquaintance Dan, was ominous of danger. Dean felt that he would gladly pass the night out in the woods exposed to the night air if he could only get away. But he saw clearly that escape was not at present practicable.

"Have you seen the old woman?" asked Dan, meaning his mother.

"Yes, she told me that she had taken in a kid for the night, but I had no idea it was any one I knew. The old lady wears well, Dan."

"Yes, she's tough," said the affectionate son, carelessly. "I'll go in and see whether she's got supper ready."

He entered the house, leaving Dean and his old employer together.

"Come here, boy, and sit down," said Kirby, smiling, and eying Dean very much as a cat eyes the mouse whom she proposes soon to devour. "You must be tired."

"Thank you," said Dean, calmly, as he went forward and seated himself on the settee beside Peter Kirby.

"What brought you so far west as Colorado?" proceeded Kirby, giving vent to his curiosity.

"I kept coming west. Besides, I heard there were mines in Colorado, and I thought I might find profitable work."

"So you gave up playing on that harmonica of yours?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't you make it pay?"

"I needed a partner like the one I started with—Mr. Montgomery. I couldn't give an entertainment alone."

"Then you haven't been making any money lately?"

"No."

"Where did you get that watch?"

"From Dr. Thorp."

"When did he give it to you?"

"Just before I left town."

"It was a present to you for informing on me, I suppose?" said Kirby, his face again assuming an ugly frown.

"I believe it was for saving him from being robbed."

"Then he had considerable money and bonds in the house?"

"Yes."

"Were they in the cabinet?"

"He removed them."

"After I went to bed?"

"I believe so."

"It seems, then, that I am indebted to you for foiling my little scheme."

Kirby looked dangerous, and Dean was alive to the peril incurred, but he was obliged, in the interests of truth, to answer in the affirmative.

Here Dan appeared at the door.

"Come in, Kirby," he said. "Supper's ready."

"I am ready for it. I am about famished. Come in, boy."

"Thank you; I have supped already."

"All the same you must come in, for I don't propose to lose sight of you. Hand over that watch, please."

"Why do you want it?" asked Dean, apprehensively.

"I have more claim to it than you. It was the price of treachery."

"I hope, Mr. Kirby, you will let me keep it."

"Hand it over without any more words!" said Kirby, roughly, "unless you want me to take it from you."

It would have been idle to resist, but Dean was not willing to hand it over, since that would have indicated his consent to the surrender.

"You can take it if you choose," he said.

"It will do after supper. Come in!"

Dean preceded Kirby into the cabin, and sat down on a stool while the two men were eating. Gradually they dropped into conversation, and Dean listened with curious interest.

"So you saw the captain, Kirby?" asked Dan.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"He lives in an obscure country place, buried alive, as I call it. It is for the sake of his family, he says."

"What family has he?"

"A wife and son—the last as like his father as two peas—the same ugly tusks, and long, oval face. Between the two I prefer the captain. The boy puts on no end of airs."

"Does he know——"

"Not a word. He thinks his father a gentleman of wealth and high birth, and holds his head high, I can tell you."

"Does that boy know him?" asked Dan, with a jerk of the head toward Dean.

"You know Brandon Bates, don't you, Dean?" said Kirby.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you like him?"

"I don't think any one in the village likes him."

"How about his father? Is he popular?"

"He is better liked than his son."

"The fact is," resumed Kirby, "the captain's boy is an impudent cub. He was insolent to me. I could have tweaked his nose with pleasure."

"There seems to be one point on which Mr. Kirby and I agree," thought Dean. But upon the whole it did not seem to him that he liked Kirby any better than Brandon Bates. Brandon had unpleasant manners, but it was clear that Kirby was a professional thief.

"When is the captain coming West?" asked Dan.

"Soon, I think. He may be needed for some work in Denver. I shall make a report to him when I have gathered the information we need, and urge him to come. He has brains, the captain has, and he must give us the advantage of them."

"What plan are you thinkin' of, Kirby?"

"Hush!" said Kirby, glancing toward Dean. "I will speak with you about that later."

After supper they went out again, and sat on the settee, both smoking pipes provided by Dan. Dean was invited to come out also, but he felt very much fatigued, and asked if he might go to bed.

"Mother," said Dan, "can the kid go up to bed?"

"Yes, if he wants to."

"I'll go up with him."

Dan led the way up a narrow staircase to the second floor. There were two rooms, each with a sloping roof. On the floor was spread a sacking filled with hay, one end raised above the general level.

"You can sleep there, youngster," said Dan. "There's no use in undressin'. Lay down as you are."

Dean was quite ready to do so. Though he was apprehensive about the future, fatigue asserted its claim, and in less than five minutes he was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEAN FINDS HIMSELF IN 'A HOLE.

Dean seemed to himself to have slept not more than an hour, though in reality several hours passed, when he was aroused by being shaken not over gently.

"Time to get up?" he asked, drowsily.

"Yes, it's time to get up," answered a rough voice.

Now he opened his eyes wide, and he saw Kirby looking down on him. At a flash all came back to him, and he realized his position.

He rose from his pallet and asked, "Can I wash my face and hands?"

"No; there is no time for it. Follow me!"

Rightly concluding that it would be useless to question Kirby, Dean followed him to the lower floor, where Dan had already seated himself at the breakfast table. In obedience to a signal Dean sat down also, and ate with what appetite he could the repast spread before him. In addition to cold meat and bread there was what passed for coffee, though it probably was not even distantly related to the fragrant beverage which we know by that name. Dean drank it, however, not without relish, for it was at least hot.

Fifteen minutes sufficed for breakfast, and then Dan and Kirby left the cabin, motioning to Dean to follow.

Outside the cabin Kirby said, "Have you a handkerchief?"

"Yes," answered Dean, wondering why such a question should be asked.

"Give it to me!"

Dean mechanically obeyed.

Kirby took it, and, folding it, tied it over Dean's eyes.

"Are we going to play blind man's buff?" asked Dean.

"Yes," answered Kirby, grimly, "and you are the blind man."

"I should like to know what you have done this for," said Dean, more seriously.

"I can't answer your question, but no harm will come to you if you keep quiet. You are going to take a walk with us."

"And you don't want me to know where you are taking me."

"You've hit it right the first time, youngster," said Dan.

"I suppose it's no use to resist," said Dean, firmly; "but I must say that you have no right to take away my freedom."

"You can say it if you want to, but it won't make any difference."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"You'll know in time."

Dan and Kirby ranged themselves one on each side of Dean, and he was walked off between them. He asked one or two questions, but was admonished to keep silence. So they walked for twenty minutes, or perhaps half an hour, when Dan left his side, and Dean was compelled to halt in the custody of Kirby.

"It's all ready!" said Dan, reappearing. Again he took Dean by the arm, and they walked forward perhaps a dozen paces.

Then Kirby said, "Here are some steps."

Dean found himself descending a flight of steps—ten in number, for he took the trouble to count them. He was getting more and more mystified, and would have given a good deal to remove the handkerchief that handaged his eyes, but it was impossible to do it even surreptitiously, for both arms were pinioned by his guides. At the end of the flight of steps they came again to level ground, and walked forward perhaps a hundred feet. Dean suspected from the earthy odor that they were under the ground. He soon learned that his supposition was correct, for his guides halted, and loosened their hold upon his arms.

"You can remove the handkerchief now," said Kirby.

Dean lost no time in availing himself of this permission.

He looked around him eagerly.

He found himself in what appeared to be not a natural, but an artificial cave—dark, save for the light of a kerosene lamp, which was placed on a little rocky shelf, and diffused a sickly light about the cellar. At the end of the room there was a passage leading, as it seemed, to some inner apartment.

Dean looked about in surprise.

"What place is this?" he asked.

"You may call it a cave if you like."

"How long are you going to stay here?"

"About five minutes."

"That will be enough for me," said Dean, shrugging his shoulders.

"Hardly. You are to stay longer."

"Are you going to leave me here—under the earth?" asked Dean, in alarm.

"Don't you be scared, youngster—you will be safe. You won't be alone. Here, Pompey."

Through the inner passage came a stunted negro, with a preternaturally large head, around which was pinned a cotton cloth in the shape of a turban. He bowed obsequiously, and eyed Dean with evident curiosity mingled with surprise.

"This boy has come to visit you, Pompey," said Kirby, with grim pleasantry.

"Yah, yah, massa!" chuckled Pompey, showing the whites of his eyes.

"You must take good care of him. Give him something to eat when he is hungry, but don't let him escape."

"Yah, massa!"

"He will ask you questions, but you must be careful what you tell him. Remember, he is not one of us, and he mustn't learn too much."

"Yah, massa! I understand. What's his name?"

"Dean."

"Dat's a funny name. I never heard the like."

"Yes, you have. Dan's like it."

"So it am, massa! Dat's a fac'."

"Now, youngster, I am going to leave you in the company of Pompey here, who will do his best to make you comfortable and happy."

"When are you coming back for me?" asked Dean, apprehensively.

"Well, that depends upon circumstances. You'd better not trouble yourself about that. Perhaps in a week, perhaps in a

month. In the meantime you will have free board, and won't have to work for a living. There are a good many who would like to change places with you."

"If you meet any such, send them along," said Dean, with a jocoseness that thinly veiled a feeling bordering upon despair.

"Ha, ha! That's a good one. Dan, our young friend is becoming a practical joker. That's right, young one. Keep up good courage. I must bid you good-by now. Come along, Dan."

The two turned away, and Dean, with despairing eyes, saw them going back to freedom and the light of day, while he was left in the company of an ignorant black in a subterranean dungeon.

"Law, honey, don't take on!" said Pompey, good-naturedly. "There ain't no harm comin' to you."

"I should think harm had come to me. Here am I shut up in this black hole!"

"Taint so bad, honey, when you're used to it. I didn't like it first myself."

"How long have you lived down here?"

"I can't justly say."

"Is it a year, or a month?"

"I can't say, young massa," answered Pompey, who was evidently bent on carrying out Kirby's admonitions not to tell too much to his young guest.

"When did you come hyah?" asked Pompey, thinking it only fair that he should ask a question.

"Into this neighborhood? I only came yesterday."

"And where did you meet Massa Kirby?"

"At the cabin of the other man—Dan. But I had seen him before. I met him first at the East, in New York State."

"In York State!" repeated Pompey.

"Yes. We traveled together for a while."

Pompey nodded his head slowly, but evidently he had no very clear idea of what it all meant.

"Are you hungry, young massa?" he asked, after a pause.

"No; I have had my breakfast."

"I must go to work," said the negro, turning to go back by the narrow passage from which he had emerged.

"May I go with you?"

"Yes, young massa, if you want to."

Anything was better than being left alone in the dark, cavernous room, and Dean followed the negro, who was so short that he could readily look over his head, till at the end of the passage he emerged into another apartment, which was fitted up as a kitchen, and contained a stove. From the stove arose an upright funnel, which pierced the roof, providing a vent for the smoke when there was a fire, and allowing air to come in from above. It flashed upon Dean that it was through this funnel had come the mysterious sounds which puzzled him so much when he was reclining in the wood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VALUE OF A HARMONICA.

About the middle of the forenoon Pompey curled up on a pallet in one corner of the room, and went to sleep. There was nothing in particular to do, and it seemed rather a sensible way of spending the time. Dean, however, felt too anxious to follow his example.

It occurred to him that it would be a good time for him to gratify his curiosity by examining the cavern in which he was immured, and devise, if possible, some method of escape. First he went up close to Pompey, and examined him carefully to see whether he was really asleep, or only shamming. But the negro's deep breathing soon satisfied him that there was no sham about his slumber. So Dean felt at liberty to begin his exploration.

He went back to the entrance, which he knew by the staircase he had descended with Kirby and Dan. He mounted to the top, and found his way barred by a trapdoor, which he tried, but unsuccessfully, to raise. It appeared to be secured by a lock, and, not having the key, there was no hope of escape. He gazed ruefully at this door, which shut him out from liberty.

"I wonder if there is any other way out of the cave," he asked himself.

It didn't seem probable, but it was, of course, possible, and worth while to investigate. If there were it would be at the other end, no doubt.

He retraced his steps, and found Pompey still fast asleep, and utterly unconscious of the movements of the prisoner under his charge.

Dean took a lamp and went farther into the cave. There seemed to be a series of excavations, connected by narrow passages. In one of these was a large box, constructed like a sailor's chest. It occurred to him that it might belong to Pompey, and be used by him to contain his clothing. But a little thought suggested that the negro was not likely to have a large stock of clothes. Probably the suit he had on was about all he possessed. What, then, did the chest contain?

At each end was a handle. Dean took hold of one and tried to lift the chest. But he found it very heavy, much heavier than it would have been had it contained clothing.

He arose to his feet and eyed it with curiosity. There was nothing elaborate about the lock, and it struck Dean that a key which he had in his pocket might possibly unlock it. Upon the impulse of the moment he knelt down and inserted it in the lock.

Very much to his surprise, and, indeed, it did seem an extraordinary chance, for it was the only key he had, it proved to fit the lock. He turned it, and raised the lid. The sight dazzled him.

Before him lay piles of gold and silver coins, and a package of bank bills. This cave was evidently the storehouse of an organized band of robbers, and the chest might be considered their treasury.

"I wonder if this is real," thought Dean. "It seems like a scene in the 'Arabian Nights.'"

It did, indeed, seem strange that this far-off nook of Colorado should be the rendezvous and treasure house of a band so widely scattered that the captain was a quiet citizen of a small town in the State of New York, nearly two thousand miles away.

How improbable it would have seemed to the citizens of Waterford, among whom Squire Bates moved, living in outward seeming the life of any other respectable and law-abiding citizen! This was the Waterford mystery, which by a series of remarkable adventures it had fallen to Dean to solve.

He locked the chest, fearing that Pompey might suddenly awake, and, following, discover what he was about. He wanted some time to think over this strange discovery, and consider what to do. To be sure, there seemed little chance of his doing anything except to remain where he was, a subterranean prisoner.

Dean felt more than ever a desire to leave the cave, but the prospect was not encouraging. Why he was kept a prisoner he could guess. He knew too much of the band, and especially of their leader, and he was considered dangerous. His imprisonment might be a prolonged one, and Dean felt that this would be intolerable.

It was in a very sober frame that he returned to the room where Pompey was still sleeping. An hour later the negro awoke and stretched himself.

"Have I been asleep long, young massa?" he asked.

"Two or three hours, I should think, Pompey."

"Dat's strange! I only just closed my eyes for a minute, and I done forgot myself."

"You might as well go to sleep. There's nothing else to do."

"I must get some dinner, honey. Don't you feel hungry?"

"I might eat something," said Dean, listlessly.

Pompey bustled around, and prepared a lunch, to which Dean, homesick as he was, did not fail to do justice. It takes a great deal to spoil the appetite of a growing boy.

After the noon repast Dean sat down. He was beginning to find the monotony intolerable.

By way of beguiling the time he took out his harmonica in an absent mood, and began to play "Old Folks at Home."

Instantly Pompey was on the alert. His eyes brightened, and he fixed them in rapture upon the young player.

"What's dat, young massa?" he asked.

"That's a harmonica."

"You do play beau'ful, young massa."

"Thank you, Pompey; I am glad you like it."

"Play some more," entreated Pompey.

Dean complied with the negro's request, partly because he was obliging, partly because it helped to fill up the time. He could scarcely forbear laughing to see Pompey rocking to and fro with his mouth open, drinking in the melodious strains.

Nature had given Pompey a rapt appreciation of music, and he began to croon a vocal accompaniment to the instrument.

"Who learn you to play, young massa?" he asked.

"I taught myself. It isn't hard."

"Dat's because your white. A poor nigger like me couldn't learn," said Pompey, half inquiringly.

"Oh, yes, you could. I see you have an ear for music. Would you like to try?"

"If you would let me."

Dean handed the negro the harmonica, and gave him the necessary directions. In the course of half an hour he was able to play through "Old Folks at Home," with substantial accuracy.

"I wish I had a harmonicum," said Pompey, wistfully. "It would make old Pompey happy."

An idea came into Dean's mind—a wild, perhaps an impracticable idea, but he resolved to carry it out, if possible.

"Pompey," he said, "I'll give you the harmonica if you'll let me out of the cave."

Pompey rolled his eyes in affright.

"Couldn't do it no how, young massa," he said. "Massa Kirby would kill me."

"He'd think I got away when you were asleep, Pompey. Come, I'll show you two or three more tunes on the instrument, and you can learn others yourself."

"I don't dare to, young massa," said Pompey, but there was a suspicion of indecision in his voice.

"Very well, then, give me back the harmonica. I will never play any more upon it."

"Oh, young massa!"

"I mean what a say, Pompey"—and Dean put the harmonica in his pocket.

Pompey eyed him with a troubled look. He was evidently weighing the matter in his mind.

"If I thought Massa Kirby wouldn't kill me," he said, reflectively.

Dean upon this redoubled his persuasions. He played another tune on the harmonica—"Sweet Home"—with variations, and this completed the conquest of his sable custodian.

"I'll do it, young massa," said Pompey, hoarsely. "Give me the harmonicum, and I'll take the risk."

Dean did not want to give him time for reflection. He seized his hat, and handed Pompey the instrument.

The negro guided him, not to the front entrance, which he already knew, but to a back exit which he had overlooked. Here there was a door skillfully concealed on the outside. Pompey drew out a key, opened it, and with infinite relief Dean again saw sunshine and breathed the air of freedom.

"Good-by, Pompey!" he said. "I thank you with all my heart."

"If Massa Kirby catch you, don't you tell him I let you go," said Pompey, hoarsely.

"No, I won't, Pompey, but I don't mean to let him catch me."

The door closed behind him, and Dean paused to consider what course to take. He must at all hazards avoid falling in with Kirby and Dan.

"That harmonica is worth its weight in gold!" thought Dean, gratefully. "It is a regular talisman."

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

Dean had no particular choice as to the direction he would take. His principal desire was to get out of the neighborhood, so as to avoid meeting Kirby or Dan, as this would insure a second term of imprisonment, from which he could not hope to escape so easily. He had a general idea of the location of the cabin in which he had passed the previous night, and he shaped his course as far away from it as possible. He looked at his watch, which Kirby had neglected to take, and found that it was between four and five in the afternoon. He did not know how far the wooded district extended, but hoped soon to emerge from it.

It might have been that he was bewildered, but the farther he traveled the more he seemed to be surrounded by trees. Moreover, the shades were deepening, and soon the night would settle about him.

"I wish I had a compass," thought Dean. "That would help me find my way out of this labyrinth."

He had met no one as yet, and this was upon the whole a relief, as the persons most likely to be encountered were Kirby and Dan. But at length a sound of voices fell upon his ear, and he stayed his steps in momentary alarm. He listened intently, but was reassured when he found that the voices were unfamiliar.

"It may be some one who can show me the way out of these woods," thought Dean. "At any rate, I don't believe they will harm a boy. I will try to find them."

Guided by the voices he directed his steps in the direction of the sound, and found himself at length in an open space. Under a tree reclined two stalwart men who, from their garb, appeared to be miners. They were lying in an easy position, and both were smoking pipes.

"Good-afternoon, gentlemen," said Dean, politely.

The two men looked up in surprise.

"Why, it's a kid!" ejaculated one. "How came you here, boy?"

"I'll tell you, if you don't mind my joining you," said Dean.

"Come and welcome! It's rather refreshing to see a young chap like you. I've got a boy at home who is within a year or two as old as you."

"I am sixteen."

"So I thought. My boy is fourteen. What is your name?"

"Dean Dunham. I come from Waterford, New York."

"Then you are from my State. I am from Syracuse. My name is Rawson—Ben Rawson. My friend here is Ebenezer

Jones, commonly called Eben, a Connecticut Yankee—Eben, shake with our young friend."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Jones," said Dean, extending his hand, with a smile.

"You must look out for Eben," said Rawson, jocosely. "Them Connecticut Yankees are as sharp as they make 'em."

"I will risk it," said Dean. "I am very glad to meet you both, for I was beginning to feel that I was lost."

"Eben and I are too good mountaineers to be easily lost. How long have you been in these woods?"

"Since yesterday noon."

"Did you sleep out?"

"No, I found a cabin where I lodged."

"You were in luck."

"In bad luck."

"How is that?" asked Rawson, in surprise. "Were you robbed?"

"No, but I found myself in the company of two men who I am pretty sure belong to a gang of robbers. One of them I had seen before—at the East. They blindfolded me, and took me to a cavern, where they left me in charge of a negro named Pompey."

"What could be their object?" asked Rawson. "You are sure you're not romancing, boy?"

"I wish I were, but the cave exists, just as certainly as I do."

"But of what use is it?"

"I think it is a hiding place for their booty," answered Dean, and he gave an account of the chest which he had opened, and the nature of its contents.

"Why didn't you take a handful of the gold?" asked Rawson.

"At the time I didn't know but I should have to remain in the cave, when, of course, it would be discovered on me. Besides, though I knew it to be stolen property, I didn't feel like taking it."

"Eben and I wouldn't be so particular. Whereabouts is this cave?"

"I think it must be three or four miles away, but I may be mistaken, for I got turned around, and may have doubled on my tracks. I have been afraid I might fall in with Kirby and Dan. When I heard your voices I thought at first it might be them."

"You're safe now, lad. We would be more than a match for them, even if they did turn up. I shouldn't mind giving them a lesson. But you haven't told us what brought you out here, lad."

"I thought I might make a better living than at home."

"And have you?"

"So far I have, but my prospects don't appear to be very bright just now."

"Don't be too sure of that. Suppose you join us."

"I shall be glad to do so, if you will let me."

"Then we'll shake hands to our better acquaintance. I'd offer you a pipe if I had an extra one."

"Thank you; I don't smoke."

"Well, lad, perhaps you're right. Smoking won't do any good to a boy like you."

"If I am to join you would you mind telling me your plans?"

"Of course I will. We're miners, as you might guess from our looks. We've been up in Gilpin County, and have done pretty well. We've got some claims there yet, but we wanted a little change and have been on a little prospecting tour."

"Have you had good luck?"

"In prospecting? No! We are on our way back, and shall settle down to work again all the better for our holiday."

"How long have you been out here?" asked Dean.

"T?"
met Bart
it, eh- wa
"Rig
"Eben"
he has m
"And
"Neve
me Ben."
"But yo
"We're
get back
to. I say
have som
"I am
sides this
"You mis
set you up in
do you say,
equal partners,
"It's just as you
guided in all things
"You are very gen
accept such a gift. If
it, and thank you."
"No, lad," persisted
said."

"But I ought not to be
others to look out for."
"You won't be, lad—Eben
down in one of the banks
dollars apiece, isn't it, Eben?"

"Yes, not far from that, R
"We will share alike for
There's more gold where the
claims will pan out well for you."

Dean felt that he had indee
might have traveled far enoug
strangers so free-handed. Indee
at home, he would scarcely hav
wild, free life of the West had
them generous.

"Hist!" said Rawson, suddenly,
an intent look, "I think I hear voi

He was right. Two men, walki
in earnest conversation, approached
Dean in excitement.

CHAPTER OUT OF THE ENE

"Eben and I will hide and leave
Rawson, rising hastily.

"But——" expostulated Dean,
"Don't be afeared, lad. They
want a little fun, that's all. We
The two darted behind a tree
turf.

Kirby and Dan approached, c
versation. They were close
him. It is needless to say that

"Look there, Dan!" said Kir
"There's the kid!"

"Well, I'm beat!" ejaculated L

ner in our
ent to call,
hers make

unwilling

t's quickly
ever know

t at Kirby.
turned and
h the two

on, "and look
much for your
as I ever saw."

hope I shall never

THE MINES.

in Gilpin County we find
Ben Rawson, Ebenezer Jones
crown taller and there is a
His eyes are bright, and his

of a miner's cabin, resting after

d, Rawson?" asked Eben Jones,

en, this afternoon, since you have
little over three thousand dollars

showing, is it? What do you say to
ou?"

seventeen."

of your age who are worth a thou-

Ben—yours and Eben's."

You have worked hard for it."

and yet you admit me to an equal

ean," said Rawson, warmly. "Isn't

Ben. The kid's been a great deal

ave got ten thousand dollars be-
less the bank's busted, which I
d chap, I feel rich!"

e," said Eben, after a thoughtful
id, Ben?"

"I should mind so much, Eben, that I should probably go along, too."

"But that would be leaving Dean alone," objected Eben.

"Perhaps he would like to make a trip East, also."

"Yes, I would," said Dean. "It's a long time since I've heard from my uncle and aunt. I think my last letter couldn't have reached them."

"There's one thing in the way," observed Rawson. "Our claims are valuable—more so than six months ago. If we leave 'em some one will take possession, and that'll be an end of our ownership."

"Sell 'em," said Eben, concisely.

"That will take time."

"I'll stay till it's done. I'm not going to give 'em away."

"Trust a Connecticut Yankee for that," said Rawson, laughing.

"Well, to-morrow, then, we'll let our neighbors know that our claims are for sale."

Dean and his friends usually bled the land here to

"We've done pretty well, though," said Rawson, complacently. "It's two thousand dollars apiece, say three, with what we've taken from it in the last six months. What do you say to that, lad? You'll go home with three thousand dollars."

"It doesn't seem possible, Ben. Why, Uncle Adin has been at work for forty years, and I don't believe the old place would fetch that."

"Money's easier to come at than in the old times. You'll astonish the old folks, lad."

"There'll be some others that'll be surprised," said Dean, smiling. "Squire Bates and Brandon among the rest."

"It's better than going home like a tramp. It's strange how much more people think of you when you're worth a little property. And I don't know but they're right. To get money, I mean honestly, a man must have some brains, and he must be willing to work. How much money do you think I had when I arrived here?"

"I don't know."

"Eighteen dollars. It was grit or brains with me, I can tell you. Eben here wasn't much better off."

"So well. I only had nine dollars."

"Now we've got eight thousand apiece. That'll make us a while, eh, Eben?"

"I shall never come back here, but settle down. People will call me a rich man."

"How is it with you, Dean?"

"I'm well, positively. There's very little

You'll have a fair start, and

and called at the
been sold.

you some

CHAPTER XXII.

AFFAIRS IN WATERFORD.

Leaving Dean in Denver, let us go back to Waterford, and see how matters stood in that quiet little village.

With Adin Dunham they did not go well. He had an attack of rheumatism during the winter, which hindered him from working for several weeks, and so abridged his earnings. Both he and his wife missed Dean, whose lively and cheerful temperament enlivened the house. They were troubled, too, because months had passed since they had heard from him.

"I don't know what has happened to Dean," said Adin, one Saturday evening, when he sat beside the kitchen fire with his wife. "Seems to me he'd write if he was in good health. I am afear'd something has gone wrong with the boy."

"I hope not, father," said Sarah Dunham, pausing in her knitting.

"So do I, Sarah, but you must agree that it's strange he don't write."

"That's true, Adin. He was always a thoughtful, considerate boy. The house seems lonesome without him."

"So it does, Sarah. But if I only knew he was, I wouldn't mind that. He may have got sick and—"

"Don't say such things, father," said Mrs. Dunham in a low voice. "I can't bear to think any harm of my boy."

"But we must be prepared for the worst, if he doesn't come."

"I am sure he is alive, and I have hopes of a more hopeful return."

"Then why do you say such things?"

"To be sure, father, I don't know what Dean's been doing."

That time came sooner than either of them thought.

Adin Dunham had scarcely completed his sentence when a knock was heard at the door—Adin had never so far fallen in with city customs as to introduce a doorbell.

Mrs. Dunham arose and opened the door.

"Good-evening, Mrs. Dunham," said the visitor, suavely.

"Good-evening, Squire Bates," said Sarah, in surprise. "Won't you walk in?"

"Yes, thank you. Is your husband at home?"

"Oh, yes, he never goes out in the evening. Adin," she said, preceding the visitor, "here is Squire Bates, who has called to see you."

"I am glad to see you, squire," said the carpenter.

"Take a chair, and excuse my gettin' up. My old enemy, the rheumatism, has got hold of me, and I'm too stiff to move easy."

"Oh, you are quite excusable, Mr. Dunham. I am sorry to hear that you are so afflicted."

"It is a great deal to be behind me behind—"

expect to pay off the mortgage with that thousand dollars that I was so wickedly robbed of."

"Oh, ah, to be sure! It was a great pity that you were prevented from doing it."

"That robbery broke me down, Squire Bates. I believe it has made me five years older, though it happened less than a year ago. It makes me feel kind of rebellious at times to think that such a villain as the man that robbed me should go unpunished."

"It isn't best to cry over spilt milk," said the squire, who felt obviously uncomfortable under these allusions.

"I can't help thinkin' of it though, squire."

"To be sure, to be sure!"

"When it was gone, I hoped that Dean would be able to help me to pay up the mortgage some time."

"Have you heard from your nephew lately?"

"Not for months. Have you heard from the man he went out with?"

"Yes, I have heard several times."

"Does he say anything about Dean?"

"He says—but perhaps I had better not tell you. I don't want to distress you," and the squire hesitated.

"Say what you have to say. I can stand it."

"He says he discharged Dean for dishonesty."

"Dean dishonest! Why, squire, you must be jokin'."

"I am sorry to say, neighbor Dunham, that there is no joke about it. Mr. Kirby is not likely to be mistaken."

"I tell you, Squire Bates," said Adin Dunham, angrily, "that my nephew Dean is as honest as I am myself. The man that charges him with dishonesty is a liar! It's a word I don't often use, but I must use it this time."

"I agree with my husband," said Sarah Dunham, her mild blue eyes sparkling with indignation. "Nothing would induce Dean to steal."

"Of course you are prejudiced in your nephew's favor," said the squire, with a slight sneer. "It's very natural, but you can't expect others to agree with you. However, we will drop this subject. I am afraid Dean will never be able to help you. I used to think well of him, though my son Brandon didn't agree with me."

"What can your son Brandon know of Dean compared with mother and me, who have known the boy since his birth?" the carpenter rejoined, warmly.

"I won't argue the question, neighbor Dunham. Indeed, I feel for you in your disappointment. But to come back to business. You mustn't blame me if I foreclose the mortgage, as the law gives me a right to do. I wouldn't do it, I assure you, if circumstances did not make it imperative."

"Foreclose the mortgage!" repeated Adin, in consternation.

"Yes, or I'll give you eight hundred dollars for the place over and above the mortgage."

"Only eight hundred dollars! Why, that would be robbery!"

"Think it over, neighbor Dunham, and don't decide hastily. You'll think differently, I am sure, when you have had time to consider it. I must bid you good-evening now, as I am in haste,"

and the squire arose quickly, and left the room, followed to the door mechanically and in silence by Sarah Dunham.

"Sarah," said the carpenter, with grief-stricken countenance, "this is worse than all. It looks as if we were, indeed, forsaken by Providence."

"Hush, Adin! That is wicked. It looks hard, but the Lord may yet give us deliverance."

"I am afraid we shall end our days in the poorhouse, Sarah," said the husband, gloomily.

"It won't be this year or next, Adin. Eight hundred dollars will support us for two years, and then there is your work, besides. Let us look on the bright side!"

But that was not easy for either of them. It seemed to Adin Dunham that his cup of bitterness was full.

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOW THE MYSTERY WAS SOLVED.

We return to Denver, where business required Dean and Ben Rawson to remain two or three days. Eben Jones was too impatient to reach home to bear them company, but started at once for Connecticut. Rawson and Dean secured a large room in the leading hotel, which they made their headquarters.

Denver was at that time far from being the handsome city it has since become. Society was mixed, and the visitors who were continually arriving and departing embraced all sorts and conditions of men. There was no small sprinkling of adventurers, both good and bad, and it was necessary for the traveler to be wary and prudent, lest he should fall a prey to those of the latter kind.

The second night our two friends retired late, having passed a busy and as it proved profitable day, for it was on that day Dean effected his purchase of lots already referred to.

"I feel fagged out, Dean," said Rawson, as he prepared for bed. "I have been working harder than I did at the mines."

"I am tired, too, but I have passed a pleasant day," said Dean. "I think I would rather live here than at the mines."

"You can have your choice when you return, but for my part I like the mines. I prefer the freedom of the mining camp to the restraints of the city."

"There isn't much restraint that I can see."

"There will be. Five years hence Denver will be a compact city."

"In that case my lots will have risen in value."

"No doubt of it. You have made a good purchase. But what I was going to say is this. I am so dead tired that it would take an earthquake to wake me. Now, as you know, we have considerable money in the room, besides what we have outside. Suppose some thief entered our room in the night!"

"I wake easily," said Dean.

"That is lucky. There's a fellow with a hang-dog look rooms just opposite, whose appearance I don't like. I have caught him spying about and watching us closely. I think he is after our money."

"What is his appearance, Ben?"

"He has red hair and a red beard. There is something in his expression that looks familiar, but I can't place him. I feel sure, at any rate, that he is a dangerous man."

"I haven't noticed him, Rawson."

"I have got it into my head somehow that he will try to enter our room when we are asleep."

"But the door is locked."

"If the man is a professional, he will be able to get in in spite of that. Now, Dean, I want you to take my revolver and put it under your pillow, to use in case it should be necessary. Of course you will wake me also in case of a visit."

"Very well, Ben."

The two undressed and got into bed. There were two beds in the room, the smaller one being occupied by Dean. This was placed over against the window, while Rawson's was closer to the door, on the right.

Dean as well as Rawson, was tired, and soon fell asleep. But for some reason his sleep was troubled. He tossed about, and dreamed bad dreams. It might have been the conversation that had taken place between Rawson and himself which shaped the dreams that disturbed him.

It seemed to him that a man had entered the room, and was rifling Rawson's pockets. The dream excited him so much that it awakened him, and none too soon, for there, bending over the chair on which Rawson had thrown his clothes, was the very man whom his companion had described. The moonlight that flooded the room revealed him clearly, with his red hair and beard, just as he had presented himself to Dean in his dreams.

Dean arose to a sitting posture, and quietly drew out the revolver from underneath his pillow.

"What are you doing there?" he demanded.

The intruder started, and, turning quickly, fixed his eyes upon Dean. He didn't appear so much alarmed as angry at the interruption.

"Lie down, and keep still, if you know what's good for yourself, kid!" he said, in a menacing tone.

"And let you rob my friend? Not much!" said Dean, boldly. "Lay down those clothes!"

"When I get ready."

"I command you to lay them down!" said Dean, boldly.

"I'll wring your neck if you don't keep quiet," said the robber, quietly.

"Rawson!" cried Dean, raising his voice.

"Confusion!" muttered the thief, as, dropping his booty, he took a step toward Dean's bed.

"Look out for yourself!" said Dean, in a tone of warning. "Come nearer, and I fire!"

Then for the first time the intruder noticed that the boy was armed. He drew back cautiously.

Just then Rawson asked sleepily, "What's the matter, Dean?"

"Wake up, Rawson, quick!" said Dean.

Ben Rawson opened his eyes, and took in the situation at once. He sprang from the bed, and placed himself between the thief and the door.

"Let me go!" exclaimed the intruder, as he made a dash forward, only to be seized by the powerful miner.

"Now let me know who you are, and whether you have taken anything," he said, resolutely. "Dean, let us have some light."

The thief struggled to escape, but in vain. His captor was stronger than himself. Dean lighted the gas, and both scrutinized the thief closely. Then a light flashed upon Dean.

"I know him in spite of his false hair and beard," he said. "It's Peter Kirby."

Rawson pulled off the disguise, and Kirby stood revealed.

"Yes, it's Kirby!" he said, doggedly. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Put you in the hands of the police," answered Rawson, coolly.

Kirby remained silent a moment, and then said: "I'll make it worth your while to let me go."

"How?" asked Rawson, briefly.

"That boy's uncle was robbed near a year since of a thousand dollars. I can tell him the name of the thief."

"Was it Squire Bates?" asked Dean, eagerly.

"Till my safety is assured I can tell nothing."

"Can you enable me to recover the money?"

"I can. I will be willing to make a statement, and swear to it before a magistrate."

"Is not Squire Bates the head of a gang of robbers?"

"I am not prepared to say. I will do what I agreed."

Rawson and Dean conferred together briefly, and decided to release Kirby on the terms proposed. But it was necessary to wait till morning, and they didn't dare to release him. They tied the villain hand and foot, and kept him in this condition till daylight. Then they took him before a magistrate, his statement was written out and sworn to, and they released him.

"I wouldn't have done this," said Kirby, "if Bates had treated me right; but he has been working against me, and I have sworn to get even."

Dean did not trouble himself about Kirby's motives, but he was overjoyed to think that through his means the mystery at Waterford had been solved at last, and his uncle would recover his property.

"Now I shall go home happy," he said, to Rawson, "for I shall carry happiness to my good uncle and aunt."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ADIN DUNHAM'S TROUBLE.

Arriving in New York, Dean was tempted to buy a handsome suit of clothes, being fully able to spare the money. But on second thought he contented himself with purchasing a cheap, ready-made suit at one of the large clothing stores on the Bowery. He wanted to surprise his uncle and aunt. Besides, he wished to see what kind of a reception his old friends would give him if he appeared in shabby attire and apparent poverty. He could let them know the truth later on.

The evening before his arrival in Waterford Adin Dunham had another call from Squire Bates.

"Have you got my interest ready, neighbor Dunham?" he inquired.

"No, squire; I can give you a part of it, as I told you the other day."

"That will not answer," said Bates, in an uncompromising tone. "I need the money at once. Some of my recent investments have paid me poorly, and though I would like to be considerate I cannot favor you."

"I will try to borrow the money. Perhaps Dean can let me have twenty dollars."

"Dean!" repeated Squire Bates, with a sneer. "Do you think I can wait till you hear from him?"

"I have heard from him," answered the carpenter.

"You have heard from your nephew! Where is he?" Squire Bates asked, in surprise.

"Here is his letter. It came to hand this morning."

Squire Bates took the proffered letter and read as follows:

"NEW YORK, July 15.

"DEAR UNCLE AND AUNT: I have got so far on my way home from the West. I will remain here a day or two. Perhaps I can hear of a place, as I suppose there is nothing for me to do in Waterford. I think I shall be with you on Saturday.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"DEAN DUNHAM."

"He doesn't appear to have made his fortune," said the squire, handing back the letter to the carpenter.

"He doesn't say whether he has prospered or not."

"If he had he wouldn't be looking for a boy's position in New York."

"Very likely you're right, Squire Bates. It's something that he has been able to get home to his friends."

"Wait till you've seen him," said the squire, significantly. "He will probably return home in rags."

"Even if he does he will be welcome," rejoined the carpenter, warmly. "Even if he comes home without a penny, he won't lack for a welcome, will he, Sarah?"

"I should think not, Adin," said his wife, in mild indignation.

"That is all very pretty and sentimental," said the squire. "Perhaps you have a fatted calf to kill for the returning prodigal."

"Dean never was a prodigal," answered Adin Dunham. "If your friend had treated him well he might have had some money to return with. It wasn't a very creditable thing to throw the poor boy upon his own resources so far away from home."

"We spoke on that subject yesterday, and I distinctly told you that Mr. Kirby had a very good reason to discharge Dean. You didn't agree with me. I suppose it is natural to stand up for your own. However, I will give you three days to make up the interest. That will carry us to Monday. But I shall also require you to pay the mortgage, or else accept my offer for the place. I will give you another week to do that."

Squire Bates went out of the room, leaving Adin and Sarah Dunham in some trouble of mind. There seemed to be no help for it. They must be dispossessed of what had been their home for many years.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY.

A little before noon on Saturday Dean reached Waterford, and walked home. On the way he met Brandon Bates.

"Halloa, so you're back!" said Brandon, eying him curiously.

"Yes, Brandon. Thank you for your warm welcome."

"I didn't mean to give you a warm welcome," said Brandon, ungraciously.

"I beg your pardon; I made a mistake."

"I suppose you came home without a cent."

"You're mistaken. I've got over a dollar in my pocket."

"What's a dollar?" sneered Brandon.

"It isn't much, to be sure."

"You won't hear very good news at your uncle's."

"Why? Is he sick—or my aunt?" asked Dean, uneasily.

"No, but he can't pay the mortgage, and my father's going to take possession of the place."

"Oh, is that all?" said Dean, relieved.

"I should think it was enough."

"Oh, perhaps your father will think better of it, as I am at home now and can help Uncle Adin pay it off."

"What can you do?" asked Brandon, mockingly.

"That's the great question. However, I'm in a hurry to get home, and must leave you. You are kind to be so much interested in me, Brandon."

"I'm not interested in you at all," returned Brandon, tartly.

Dean laughed and passed on.

"That boy's as impudent as ever," soliloquized Brandon. "He'll feel differently on Monday."

In the joy of seeing Dean again his uncle and aunt lost sight for a time of their troubles, but after a while Adin Dunham said gravely, "It's well you came home as you did, Dean, for the old home is about to pass from me."

"How is that, Uncle Adin?"

"Squire Bates is going to foreclose the mortgage. He offers to buy the place and give me eight hundred dollars over and above what I owe him."

"Of course you declined?"

"It will do no good. I must yield to necessity."

"Squire Bates shall never have the place," said Dean, resolutely.

"Who will prevent it?"

"I will."

"But, Dean, what power have you? The squire is firmly resolved."

"So am I."

"But—"

"Uncle Adin, ask me no questions, but rest easy in the thought that you won't lose your home. Leave the matter in my hands. That is all you need to do."

"Sarah, what does the boy mean?"

"He means something, Adin. We may as well leave it in his hands as he asks."

"Very well, I don't know as he can do any harm—or good."

"That remains to be seen, uncle."

Dean went to church on Sunday, and received a warm welcome from nearly all the congregation, for he was popular with those of all ages. He wore a smiling, untroubled look which puzzled Squire Bates and Brandon.

"Does he know that I am going to foreclose the mortgage?" asked the squire, of Brandon.

"Yes, for I told him."

"It seems strange that he should be so cheerful."

"He won't be—to-morrow."

"No, I apprehend not."

* * * * *

When Squire Bates called at the carpenter's modest home Dean opened the door, and invited him into the sitting-room, where the two found themselves alone.

"I want to see your uncle," said the squire.

"If it's about the mortgage, I will attend to that matter."

"You—a boy?"

"Yes, I feel competent to settle the matter."

"There is only one way of settling it, by paying the money."

"I propose to pay it as soon as——"

"Well, as soon as what?"

"As soon as you restore to my uncle, with interest, the thousand dollars you stole from him nearly a year since."

"What do you mean by this insolence?" demanded Squire Bates, springing to his feet and glaring at Dean.

"I mean," answered Dean, slowly, "that I have the sworn testimony of Peter Kirby, given me at Denver, implicating you in that robbery."

"Show it to me," said the squire, turning livid.

"Here is a copy. The original is in the hands of a New York lawyer."

Squire Bates took the paper in his trembling fingers, and read it deliberately.

"This is a lie!" he exclaimed, hoarsely.

"The matter can come before the courts if you wish it. My uncle recognized you at the time of the robbery, but no one would believe his testimony. Fortunately, it will be substantiated now."

"But this is the most utter absurdity. Does anybody believe that a man of my reputation would be implicated in a highway robbery?"

"They will find it equally hard to believe that you are the captain of a band of robbers with headquarters in Colorado. I have been in the cave where your booty is concealed, and know what I am talking about."

After fifteen minutes more the squire capitulated, only making it a condition that Dean would keep secret the serious discoveries which he had made.

"I will do so, unless I am summoned to testify in court," said Dean.

"Leave me to explain matters to your uncle," said the squire.

Dean called the carpenter into the room.

"Mr. Dunham," said Squire Bates, with his old suavity, "I have arranged matters satisfactorily with your nephew. He has recovered the large sum of which you were robbed a year ago, and paid the mortgage, or is prepared to do so. Dean, if you will accompany me to my office we will arrange this affair."

"But, who stole the money?" asked Adin Dunham, bewildered.

"I promised not to tell," said Dean. "Was I right?"

"Yes, yes, as long as you got the money back."

Dean received the mortgage back canceled, and something over two hundred dollars besides, which he placed in his uncle's hands. Adin Dunham looked ten years younger, and his face was radiant. His joy was increased when Dean told him how he had prospered out West, and gave his aunt five hundred dollars, reserving for himself the remainder of the thousand which he had brought home.

Two months later Dean returned to Denver to find that his lots had considerably increased in value. Gradually he sold them off for twice what he paid, and entered business in the Queen City of Colorado.

Squire Bates soon removed from Waterford, and the villagers have heard nothing of him since. But Dean could tell them that his connection with the band of robbers was discovered, and that he is upon conviction serving a protracted term in a Western prison. What has become of Brandon or his mother is not known to the general public, but it is less than a year since Dean, while leaving the Denver post office, was accosted by a shabbily dressed young man who asked for assistance.

"Are you not Brandon Bates?" asked Dean, after a brief glance.

Brandon was about to hurry away, but Dean detained him. "Don't go," he said. "I am glad to help you," and he placed two gold eagles in the hands of the astonished Brandon.

"Come to me again if you are in need," said Dean, in a friendly manner.

"Thank you! I didn't expect this from you," said Brandon. "I thought you would triumph over me."

"If I did I should show myself unworthy of the good fortune that has come to me. I wish you good luck."

That was the last Dean has seen of Brandon. Let us hope that he will deserve good luck, and attain it.

Adin Dunham still lives, happy in the companionship of his good wife, and the prosperity of his nephew. But there is one thing that puzzles him. He has never been able to solve The Waterford Mystery.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 55, will contain "Among Russian Nihilists; or, The Great Assassination Plot." By Jacques Simon, of the French Secret Service. This is a most extraordinary story by a very famous man. The hero, an American boy, is a splendid fellow, and the exciting adventures he passes through, we venture to state, have never been equaled. It is a story to thrill you through and through, and it cannot be too highly recommended.

Largest Circulation of Any 5c. Library Published

Tip Top Weekly

THE IDEAL PUBLICATION FOR THE AMERICAN YOUTH

The stories that appear in Tip Top have been written especially for the bright, up-to-date American lad. They detail the adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell, two brothers, who are all-around athletes with plenty of pluck and dash.

LATEST NUMBERS

384—Frank Merriwell's Quick Move; or, Cooling Off Cap'n Wiley.

385—Dick Merriwell's Red Friend;

or, Old Joe Crowfoot to the Front.

386—Frank Merriwell's Nomads; or, Cap'n Wiley's Clever Work.

387—Dick Merriwell's Distrust;

or, Meeting the Masked Champions.

388—Frank Merriwell's Grand Finish;

or, The Independent Champions of America.

389—Dick Merriwell Back at Fardale; or, Getting Onto the Eleven.

390—Dick Merriwell's New Enemy; or, The Hatred of Barron Black.

391—Dick Merriwell's Hard Struggle;

or, Great Work on the Gridiron.

392—Dick Merriwell Held in Check;

or, Chester Arlington's Successful Move.

393—Dick Merriwell's Firm Hand; or, Settling Old Scores.

394—Dick Merriwell's Last Resort; or, Fighting Hard to the Finish.

*To be had from all newsdealers, or sent upon the receipt of price, 5c.,
by the publishers*

STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., New York City